

WILD WEST



A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Application made for Second-Class Entry at N. Y. Post-Office.

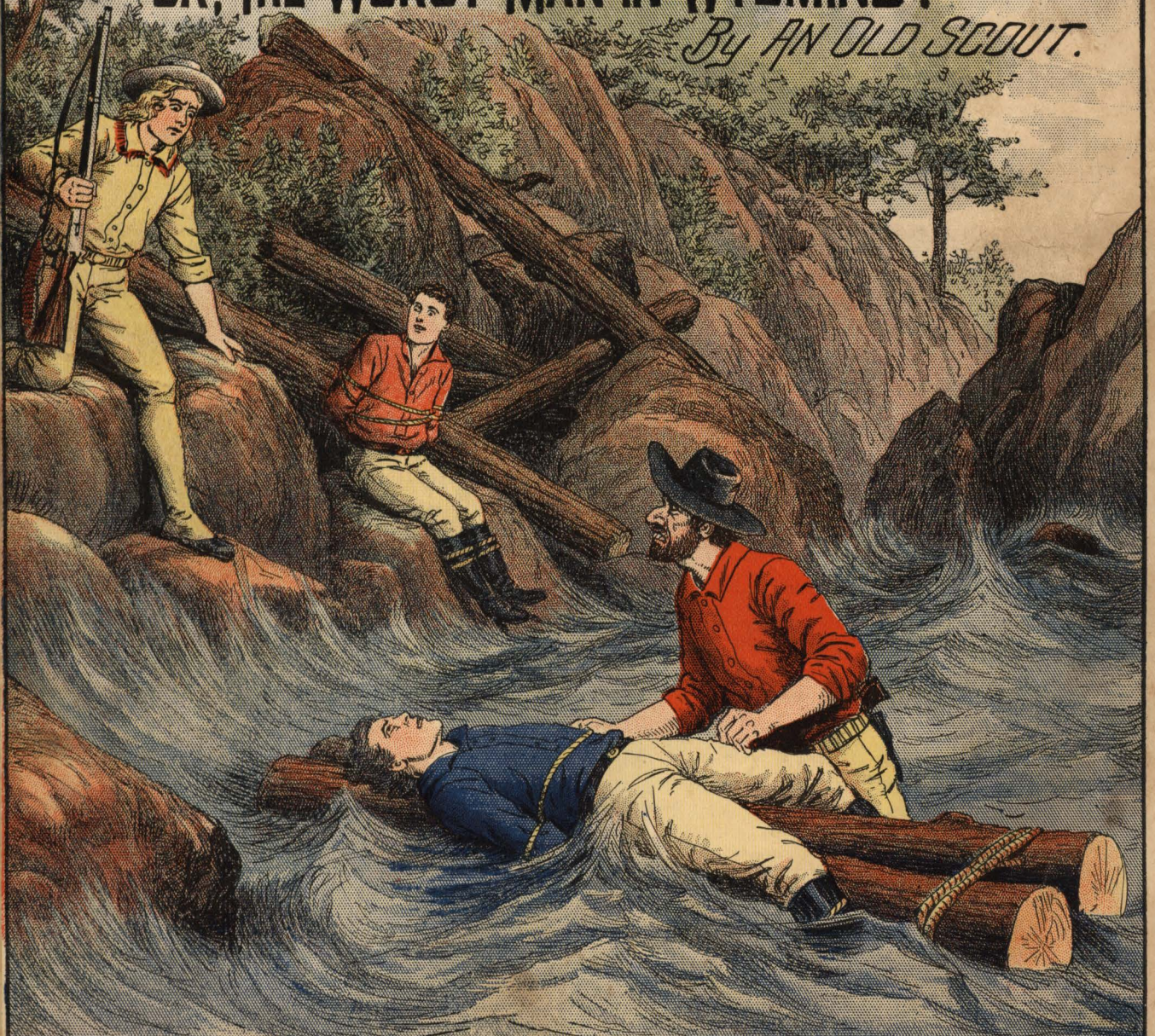
No. 102.

NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 30, 1904.

Price 5 Cents.

YOUNG WILD WEST AND MISSOURI MIKE; OR, THE WORST MAN IN WYOMING.

By AN OLD SCOUT.



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YOUNG WILD WEST AND 'MISSOURI MIKE'

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CHAPTER I.

THE WORST MAN IN WYOMING MEETS WITH A SETBACK.

It was a rather warm day in the fall of the year when three horsemen came to a halt on the east bank of the Platte River where it wound its crooked way through the southeastern part of Wyoming and looked about for some place to get to the other side.

The river was swollen and turbulent, showing quite plainly that there had been a heavy rain, and at that point it would have been quite an undertaking to cross it without the horses being swept off their feet and the riders from being thoroughly drenched.

A glance at the three horsemen would have impressed the casual observer with the belief that neither of them was afraid to make the attempt, as they were about as sturdy and athletic-looking a trio as one would be apt to come across in a month's journey.

Two of them could hardly be called anything more than boys, since neither of them had reached his twenty-first birthday, and the other was a tall, handsome man of probably ten years their senior.

They were all attired in buckskin hunting-suits and were armed with rifles, revolvers and bowie-knives.

The most striking one of the trio was one of the boys. He was mounted on a magnificent sorrel stallion, and he sat in the saddle with such ease and grace that he looked like a veritable Centaur.

Perfect in figure, handsome in face, dark-eyed and a wealth of chestnut hair streaming over his shoulders, he

certainly looked to be the real type of a hero of the Wild West.

And that is just what he was, for the boy was no other than Young Wild West, commonly known as the Prince of the Saddle and Champion Deadshot of the West.

The other boy was Jim Dart, a chum of his, who had stuck to him through thick and thin—a fearless and cool-headed young fellow—who had been born and reared in the wildest part of Wyoming.

The tall man was the famous scout and Indian fighter who bore the name of Cheyenne Charlie, and with his rather dark complexion, eagle eyes and long black hair and flowing mustache, he certainly looked to be what he was.

Young Wild West and his two partners!

That was what the three were called by those who knew them.

And as they were known pretty well throughout the West, they possessed many friends and foes alike.

They were out on a hunting trip and looking for anything that might turn up in the line of adventure.

Young Wild West was a terror to evil-doers, and when he once got upon the trail of a bad white man or a redskin who was on the warpath he never let up until the game was quarried.

"Well, boys," he said to his partners, "there don't appear to be much chance of getting over—not right here, anyway. It rained so hard all day yesterday and last night that the river is more than three times its usual size. Even if there was a ford around here it would hardly be safe to cross."

"Well, suppose we ride up the bank a ways?" suggested Jim Dart. "We are pretty certain to strike a place where we can cross if we go far enough."

"That's right," chuckled Cheyenne Charlie. "If we foller ther stream on up we might strike a place where we kin jump over it. But that wouldn't be to-day, hardly."

"Oh, I guess we won't have to go as far as that, Charlie."

"No," spoke up Wild. "If we can't do any better we will make our horses swim the river at the first wide place where the current does not run so swift."

They now acted on the advice of Dart and rode up along the bank of the stream.

It was near noon and our friends were getting hungry.

It had been their idea to get across the river and reach a mining town called Four Flush, which they had reason to believe was not more than five or six miles away, before they satisfied their appetities, but since they had found the stream so swollen it struck them that their dinner would be apt to be a late one if they waited.

Cheyenne Charlie, who was always possessed of a good appetite, was thinking about this very thing now.

"I reckon we'd better go into camp an' fry some of this bear meat, if we don't git across by noon," he said, as he placed his hand on a ham that had been cut from a young grizzly which was hitched to the back of his saddle.

"I guess Charlie has got it about right, Wild," spoke up Jim. "I don't know what sort of a place Four Flush is, but the chances are that we won't be able to get a meal there before supper-time. From what we have heard, the population is only about a hundred, and that means that there are not many first-class hotels there."

"We'll jest about find a tavern, sixteen shanties, a couple of dozen tents, a supply store, a whisky mill, a blacksmith shop, an' another whisky mill in ther town of Four Flush," observed the scout, with a grin. "I've seen places jest like it, though I ain't never seen this one. But as it ain't over three months old, a feller ain't had much of a chance to see it."

"That's right, Charlie," laughed Young Wild West. "You've got the place down fine. I can see it in my mind now. I am glad the blacksmith shop is there, for Spitfire's shoes are getting a little loose and I want them reset."

His partners joined him in laughing, and then they lapsed into a silence.

This was suddenly broken by a cry that rang out above the roaring of the angry stream.

They reined in their steeds to listen, and then the cry was repeated.

"Help—help!" came to their ears from somewhere up the stream.

"I guess we had better see what the trouble is," said Young Wild West, starting his horse forward at a sharp trot.

His companions followed him closely, and when they had covered about a hundred yards they suddenly came upon a stream that flowed into the river, which was a regular rapids.

The boiling water dashed high in the air as it went surging over the rocky bed and several logs were whirling, tossing about as they went toward the river.

Young Wild West suddenly caught sight of a moving figure ahead, and, bringing his horse to a halt, he quickly dismounted.

"Wait a minute, boys," he said. "I'll go and see what the trouble is."

Rifle in hand, he hastened up a little hill, and by peering through the bushes he beheld a scene that was somewhat startling.

A big man in the garb of a miner, whose face was repulsive and savage-looking, was in the act of tying a young man to a couple of logs that were in the shallow water near the bank of the stream.

Seated on a rock upon the bank not far away was another young man with his hands tied behind him.

Our hero took in the whole scene very quickly.

Just what the big villain was up to he hardly knew, but he soon learned.

"I'm goin' to send you down ther rapids on these here logs!" he exclaimed, looking at the young fellow he was tying to the logs. "I'll show yer how I fix people what come prowlin' around my camp. I'm ther worst man in Wyoming; I am, an' I never shoot a feller if I've got time to rig a way that'll make him be a few minutes in dyin'! You tenderfoot hunters thought you'd git hold of ther gold-dust I've got, but you didn't. I fooled you both, didn't I? An' caught you, too! You needn't think I'm foolin'! You're goin' down ther rapids on these logs, an' as soon as you're out of sight, your friend will foller you on a couple more. I'm usin' two logs, so you won't turn over an' drown too quick. I'm ther worst man in Wyoming, I am!"

"Mercy!" came from the victim. "Don't send me to my death. We had no more idea of robbing you than we had of flying to the moon! Don't! You must be fooling. You surely don't mean to send me down the rapids!"

"I don't, hey?" was the savage rejoinder. "Jest wait! There! I reckon you're hard an' fast now. Here you go!"

The young man uttered a wild cry of despair and then a prolonged call for help came from his lips.

Young Wild West saw that the man really meant to send the young fellow down the rapids to an almost certain death.

"Hold on, there!" he cried, stepping toward the stream; "I guess you had better not do that."

The villain who had called himself the worst man in Wyoming gave a violent start and turned his gaze upon the speaker.

"You have just one minute to cut that man loose!" our hero exclaimed. "Hurry up, now, or it will be you who will go down the rapids, and when you go you will have a bullet through your heart!"

"Howlin' hyenas!" roared the villain, his brow turning as black as a thundercloud. "You dare to tell me what I must do, you meddling young galoot! Why, I'll——"

"You'll cut that young fellow loose inside of thirty seconds or else die!"

As Wild said this he leveled his rifle at him and stood as still as a statue.

The manner of the worst man in Wyoming changed instantly.

He could see that the dashing-looking boy meant business.

He did not hesitate longer than five seconds; then he whipped a knife from his belt and cut the ropes that held his victim to the logs.

The young man was upon his feet in a twinkling and wading to the bank.

"Are you all right, my friend?" asked our hero.

"Yes, thank you," was the reply. "I am very glad you happened along in time to save me."

"Don't mention it. Just release your friend. I am satisfied that you two fellows are not thieves; and if you are I am not going to allow you to be disposed of in that manner."

"We are not thieves, sir," spoke up the one who sat upon the rock in a helpless condition. "We will very soon prove to you that we are honest. We came upon that man accidentally and he knocked me down with a club and then made my friend bind me by holding a revolver at his head. We are out on a hunting trip, and the man we had for a guide was shot by someone in hiding about an hour ago. We came to the river, thinking we might meet someone who would advise us what to do. When we came upon the villain you have covered there he acted in a friendly way until he got a good chance to knock me down. I honestly believe that he is the man who shot our guide."

"You lie! You lie!" shouted the villain, making a move to step out of the water. "You—you——"

"Shut up!" commanded Young Wild West. "Just hold your hands over your head, or I'll shoot you! I mean what I say!"

Reluctantly the fellow put up his hands.

"Now step out of the water."

He did so.

At this juncture there was a rustling in the bushes and Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart stepped in view.

They had seen all that took place from the bushes, but had not offered to show themselves before.

However, in case Wild had not been able to bring the villain to terms, they would have asserted themselves.

The rescued young fellow had released his companion by this time, and when the two saw that there were two more on the scene they were delighted.

"Charlie," said Wild, in his cool and easy way, "just take the shooter and knife from the worst man in Wyoming, as he calls himself, and then tie his hands behind him. I rather think he is altogether too bad to run loose."

"I'll fix ther measly coyote in short order," retorted Charlie, and he promptly proceeded to do as he was directed.

The two young men who had been saved just in the nick of time were likely-looking fellows of perhaps twenty-one or two.

That they were "tenderfeet" was quite evident, but they did not appear to be cowards.

They had been caught napping by the big brute of a man, and what had taken place was nothing more than would have happened if any of our average young men had been there.

A revolver in the hands of a big, ugly-looking man is bound to act in a persuasive way.

"If I had known he meant to send us over the rapids tied to logs I believe I would have let him shot me before I tied Joe," said the one Wild had saved. "But it was all so sudden-like, and the muzzle of the revolver was pointed right at my right eye! I had to tie him up, it seemed."

Our friends learned that the two young men were Billy Egbert and Joe Beck, from Minneapolis, and that they had come out to rough it in the wilds of Wyoming for a month or so.

CHAPTER II.

MISSOURI MIKE IS TAKEN TO FOUR FLUSH.

After they were thoroughly acquainted with each other and Billy Egbert and Joe Beck had expressed their thanks to him several times, Young Wild West turned to the prisoner and said:

"Where is your camp?"

"On ther other side of ther river," he answered in a surly tone.

"Good! I want you to take us to it."

"All right. I'll do that. But I want to tell you one thing, an' that is, that you've made a big mistake by botherin' me. I was only tryin' to scare ther two tenderfeet; I never had no more idea of sendin' 'em down ther rapids than you did. I'm an honest man, even if they do call me ther worst man in Wyoming down at Four Flush."

"It may be that you were fooling, but I doubt it," retorted Wild. "Anyhow, I am going to take you to Four Flush with us. You say you are known there, so if the men there say you are all right you will be set free."

"I'm satisfied to let it go at that!"

The man seemed to be pleased, for he smiled as much as to say, "I'll git square with you for this when I do git free!"

"Our camp is on the other side of the river, too," said Billy Egbert. "The ford is up here a-ways. We saw this man over on this side, and that is why we crossed. You can jump this creek about a hundred yards back here, and then we'll strike the ford in less than five minutes and get on the other side of the river."

"All right. Boys, just fetch along the horses."

The last remark was addressed to Charlie and Jim, who promptly turned and went back.

In a couple of minutes they came back, riding their own steeds and leading the sorrel stallion owned by Young Wild West.

Then the prisoner was placed between the two young

men and our hero told them to lead the way to the other side of the river.

They walked up the creek a ways and found a spot where the stream was quite narrow. Egbert jumped over and then called upon the worst man in Wyoming to follow his example.

"I can't do it with my hands tied," he said.

"Yes, you can!" exclaimed Wild, who was riding his horse right behind him. "It is either a case of you jumping over or falling into the water and drowning. Suit yourself, but jump, anyhow."

That was enough!

The villain stepped back and took a short run, making the leap quite easily.

As it was not quite six feet across, this was quite an easy thing to do.

Then Joe Beck followed.

"I suppose your horses can leap over?" said the young man, questioningly, as he turned around.

"Oh, I guess they can do as well as that, can't they, boys?" answered Young Wild West, with a laugh. "Now, I'll just show you how easy Spitfire can go over."

He tightened the bridle-rein and spoke to the stallion and then Spitfire darted forward, leaping the creek as lightly as a feather.

Jim and the scout followed in quick succession.

"You have fine horses, all three of you," said Beck, looking at their mounts admiringly. "They are much better than the ones we bought at Cheyenne."

"Well, we do lots of riding about the country, and it stands us in hand to have fine horses," said Wild. "You say you only came out here to spend a few weeks, so almost any kind of horses will do, unless you are chased by Indians outlaws some time."

"Why, are there any Indians or outlaws out here—I mean Indians that would interfere with a white man?" asked Egbert.

"You are liable to strike them sometimes. Outlaws are quite plentiful, though," and our hero nodded at the prisoner. "How does he look for an outlaw?"

"Well, I am satisfied that he is a pretty bad man."

The eyes of the man flashed and he bit his lip to keep from making some sort of a reply.

"By the way," resumed Wild, turning to him, "you say you are the worst man in Wyoming, what's your name?"

"Michael Heth is ther name I was christened with," was the reply. "I was born in Missouri an' lived there till I struck here about a month ago. They call me Missouri Mike."

"Missouri Mike, the worst man in Wyoming, eh? Well, the name sounds good for a bad man, but I don't believe you are quite as dangerous as you would make us believe. I am sure I had no trouble in bringing you to terms."

"Never you mind!" was the quick reply. "There'll come some other time for me to be on top."

"You think so, eh? Well, Missouri Mike, if the miners over at Four Flush say you are all right, I suppose we will

have to let you go. But if you go to bothering with me, just look out! I am Young Wild West, and I have got the name of being the Champion Deadshot of the West. If I ever draw bead on you it will be up with you, just as sure as you are standing there!"

There was nothing of the brag in the way the boy said this.

He spoke in a voice that was full of meaning, and it was quite plain that he impressed the man.

Missouri Mike then walked along in silence between Egbert and Beck and the river bank was soon reached.

The river broadened considerably at this point, and there were numerous big stones in it, so a man could step and leap from one to the other and get over without hardly wetting his feet.

But there was only one way for the horses to get across, and that was for them to plunge into the water and walk across, for it was not over their heads.

Egbert and Beck managed to get Missouri Mike over, though the big villain slipped once and got wet up to his hips, and then Young Wild West dismounted and walked over, leaving his horse on the bank.

Once on the opposite shore he uttered a sharp whistle.

The sorrel pricked up his ears and quickly plunged into the water.

He managed to get over without wetting the top of the saddle, and the two tenderfeet clapped their hands to applaud the intelligent animal.

Charlie and Jim had dismounted by this time, and they promptly led their horses to the bank and sent them across after Spitfire.

They came over on the stones then and then they were ready to proceed.

"The horses understand just what you want them to do," said Beck.

"Oh, they knowed enough to come over after Wild whistled to Spitfire," replied Charlie. "They're together a great deal, an' if one goes to a place ther others are apt to foller, you know."

"I see."

Wild now told the two young men to lead the way to their camp, and then he mounted his horse.

"It isn't far," said Egbert. "We'll be there in less than five minutes."

It was a pretty thickly wooded country that they were in and that prevented them from seeing the camp until they got right to it.

The young men had a tent that seemed to be brand-new erected and everything was ship-shape around it.

If it had not been for the object that lay stiff and silent under a piece of canvas close by the surroundings would have been perfect for a camping-out place.

"There lies the body of our guide," said Egbert. "He was shot in the back by someone unknown to us, and when we went out to look for help a little later this is the only man we found," and he indicated Missouri Mike.

"Yes, but I didn't shoot no one," spoke up the man. "It

don't say that because you run across me that I shot ther feller, does it?"

"Oh, no!" retorted Young Wild West. "He has not said that you fired the shot that put an end to the guide. It strikes me that it is quite likely, though."

The worst man in Wyoming frowned darkly at our hero when he said this.

"It's your turn now," was all he said.

"Which means that you are going to have revenge upon me, I suppose?"

"I ain't ther one to furgit things, I jest said."

"I know you did. But there are some things you might forget. Just mind your eye when you attempt to bother with me or my partners."

"I know my business putty well. I ain't called the worst man in Wyoming fur nothin', you kin bet."

Our friends took a look around the camp.

"Well," said he, after a pause, "I don't know what you two fellows propose to do, but I should think it would be advisable for you to take the body of the guide to the nearest town, which is probably Four Flush, and report what happened to him."

"All right, Young Wild West. We'll do just as you say," answered Joe Beck. "Four Flush is the nearest place."

"How far is it from here?"

"Only about four or five miles."

"Well, we'll put the body of the guide on his horse and strike out, then."

"If you're bound to take me to Four Flush, let me have my horse to ride on, won't you?" spoke up Missouri Mike.

"Oh, certainly! I forget about paying a visit to your camp. We were going there first, I believe."

"I know you said that," put in Egbert. "But I didn't think it would make any difference, so when you said come here we came on. The man's camp, such as it is, isn't far from here. It is just behind that hill over there."

"Well, one of you come over there with me, then, while the rest are getting ready to leave for the mining camp. You had better take everything with you, and when you strike out again you can pick out some other place to camp in."

"That's so!" exclaimed Beck. "We have had quite enough of this spot. The guide was a good fellow, and I feel sorry for him. He told us that he was not married, though, and that makes it a little better."

Wild and Egbert now started for the place Missouri Mike had made his headquarters.

They soon reached it and found it to be a small, level spot in a clump of pines.

His camping outfit consisted of a couple of blankets, which were branded with the "U. S. A." and a frying-pan and coffee-pot.

That was about all he had.

The horse he had was a raw-boned gray, and was above the average size, like its owner.

Egbert quickly saddled the steed and put the trappings on behind the saddle.

"Now, then, just put your foot in the stirrup," said Wild to the prisoner.

He did so.

"Up you go!" and Missouri Mike got such a sudden lift that he nearly rolled over the horse completely.

He looked at the handsome young athlete as he got righted up in the saddle.

"Did you do that alone?" he asked.

"Yes. Why?"

"You are pretty strong, I guess."

"Well, I can generally lift my share when it comes to the test."

"You are only a boy, too."

"Oh, that don't make any difference. I am about as strong and active as any man you ever tackled, I guess."

"You are, or else you are an awful bluffer."

"Well, you ought to know something about it by this time."

The worst man in Wyoming smiled a sickly smile.

But he said no more just then, and Egbert led his horse back to where the others were waiting.

A few minutes later the party set out for Four Flush.

As was his custom, Young Wild West rode at the head of his friends when they entered the camp.

It was not one o'clock yet, and several miners were standing in front of a shanty saloon.

When they saw the party coming with a dead man hanging over one of the horses they were somewhat surprised.

But when they saw Missouri Mike a prisoner they were more so.

They all seemed to know the bad man.

Wild sized them up as he brought his horse to a stop in the middle of the sandy street.

For the most part they were a very bad-looking lot.

He could see that at a glance.

"What's ther matter, Mike?" bawled out a big fellow with a faded red shirt and rope suspenders. "What's up?"

"Oh, this here young feller what calls himself Young Wild West caught me nappin' an' made me his prisoner. He done it jest 'cause I was havin' a little fun with ther two tenderfeet what hired Wes Mundy to take 'em out on a huntin' trip. There's Wes! He's dead as a doornail, an' no one seems to know who finished him."

The last was said significantly, and our friends knew what it meant.

The worst man in Wyoming was trying to lead the men to believe that he was of the opinion that either the two young men or their new-found friends knew something about the murder.

Wild thought it about time to put in a few words.

CHAPTER III.

YOUNG WILD WEST SURPRISES THE NATIVES.

"Gentlemen," said Wild, casting a sweeping glance at the crowd, "I caught this man in the act of sending one of these young men to his death, while he had the other tied

and waiting for his turn. I stopped him, gentlemen! I stopped him very quickly, and here he is. In my opinion he is a very bad character and very much in need of a rope. But I promised to let him go if you people would vouch for him."

A roar went up as if from one throat.

The scowls and black looks that our hero received were many.

At length one of the men blurted out:

"Your opinion of Missouri Mike is wrong, stranger. He's as white as snow, an' he's ther worst man in Wyoming, so you'd better look out when he gits free."

"I will look out all right, my friend. I am not afraid of Missouri Mike, or a dozen like him. Since it seems to be the opinion of the miners here that he should go free, I am going to liberate him. But I want him to understand one thing, and that is that he must not bother the two young fellows he was going to send down the rapids tied to logs. And, another thing, if you want to learn how the guide was shot you had better ask him, for I can see it written in his eyes that he was the coward who fired the shot."

The crowd looked surprised at the boy when he talked in this way.

It did not seem possible that he dared accuse the worst man in Wyoming of the crime of shooting a man from ambush.

Missouri Mike had made a great reputation since he had been at Four Flush.

He had scared every man who had dared to resent his overbearing ways, and had proved himself to be a very quick shot with the revolver.

But here was a boy talking just as though the worst man in Wyoming simply amounted to nothing.

And when Wild dismounted and cut the thongs that bound the villain's wrists together the crowd was more astonished.

"Get down, you ugly-looking brute!" commanded Wild.

He was bent on showing the tough gang that he was ready for any sort of business, and he knew there was nothing like a show of nerve that would excite the admiration and respect of such a crowd.

The instant Missouri Mike was on the ground the man with the rope suspenders stepped over to him and handed him a revolver.

He probably thought the big villain would use it on Young Wild West, but he was mistaken.

He simply held it in his hand.

"What did you do that for?" Wild asked, looking at the miner who had taken so much on himself.

"I don't know as that is any of your business!" was the retort.

"Well, I think it is. You just take that shooter back, do you hear? My partner there has the weapons that belong to the man I just set free. He will get them in a minute or two. You just take that shooter from him, and be careful how you handle it, too!"

"Gracious, stranger! do you know who you're talkin' to?"

"Oh, I rather think I do. You are not dangerous, are you?"

"His name is Young Wild West," spoke up Missouri Mike. "He's a sorter wonder, boys."

He handed the revolver back as he spoke.

"Now, Charlie, you can give this very bad man his knife and shooters," and our hero turned to the scout.

"Sartin!" was the quick response. "Here you are, you measly coyote!"

Missouri Mike took the weapons without a word, and then he turned and walked into the saloon.

He was quite satisfied for the time being, but it was plain that the crowd was not.

The man with the rope suspenders acted as though he did not want to let it go at that.

He stepped back and held a whispered consultation with two or three.

Then they stepped over and took charge of the body of the slain guide.

"I reckon we'll bury ther poor feller, an' then we'll settle accounts with them that had to do with his death," said one.

He looked at Billy Egbert and Joe Beck as he spoke and nodded significantly.

The two young men were not slow to notice this, and they looked appealingly to Young Wild West and his partners.

But Wild did not appear to take them very seriously.

"Gentlemen," said he, turning to the cluster of rough-looking men, "is there a place in town where we can get a good, square meal?"

"I reckon you kin git it over at ther High Top Tavern," answered one, pointing to a shanty hotel a little farther up the crooked street of the camp.

"All right. Thank you! Come on, boys!"

Our hero made a move as though he was going to vault upon the back of his horse, but he did not do it.

It was probably well that he did not.

The report of a pistol sounded from the door of the saloon and a bullet whizzed through the air in about the place he would have been if he had gone on up, instead of dropping to the ground again.

"The worst man in Wyoming did that, I'll bet!" said our hero, calmly. "Well, if he wants to take his medicine it is no fault of mine. Here goes!"

Revolver in hand, he leaped toward the half-open door, firing a shot as he went, just to let the villain know he was coming.

He pushed open the door, only to hear a crashing of glass from a rear room.

There was no one in the place, not even the man who was in charge of it.

He had stayed outside to see what was going on.

Missouri Mike must have been pretty honest, in his way

of thinking, otherwise he would have followed him in the place.

Wild did not stop, but went on through to the back room.

There was a window opening into the back yard and the sash had been knocked clean out of it.

"He got away in a hurry, I guess," thought the dashing boy, smiling. "I guess the shot I fired started him going, if he had not started before. Well, I shan't follow him just now. Missouri Mike might be the worst man in Wyoming, but he is a coward, notwithstanding it."

As our hero walked back into the bar-room several men came in, among the foremost being Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart.

"He jumped out of the back window, boys. I couldn't get a shot at him," said Wild.

The rough-looking miners looked at each other in amazement.

This was not the way they expected Missouri Mike would act.

Wild did not want to let the men know that he thought anything about them so he did not ask them to have something at the bar as he usually did when he landed at a strange place.

He simply walked out of the saloon as though nothing had happened, and Charlie and Jim followed.

But all three were keeping an eye on the gang.

Not one of them offered to interfere, however, so they took their horses and led them over to the shanty hotel.

The two young men from Minneapolis went with them, as a matter of course.

It so happened that the hotel was kept by an honest man.

The better element of the miners who were addicted to the use of spirituous liquors hung out there, too, but there were only a couple of them there now, as they were at work on their claims.

"Landlord, we would like to have something to eat, how about it?" asked Wild, as he entered the place.

"I reckon you kin git it, stranger," was the reply. "Ah! so here's ther two young hunters got back a'ready, hey?"

He looked at Egbert and Beck and then grinned, as much as to say he thought they would soon tire of roughing it in the mountains.

The young men had stopped there, and it was from the hotel they had hired the services of the guide.

"We came back because our guide got shot," said Egbert.

"What!" cried the landlord, whose name was Glover.

They quickly told him what had happened.

"Well," and Glover shrugged his shoulders, "I don't want to say anything, 'cause it don't do to say much in this minin' camp, but I've got an idea who it was that gave ther feller his medicine."

"Oh, we have all got an idea about it," spoke up Jim Dart. "Missouri Mike was the man who did it."

"Most likely."

As he said this the landlord spoke in a whisper and looked around to make sure that nobody was listening.

"Missouri Mike is a sort of terror in Four Flush, I guess," observed Wild, with a smile.

"Well, I reckon he is. He's ther worst man in Wyoming, fur a fact he is. He's got ther biggest part of ther gang at his back, too, an' that makes us what's tryin' to be honest an' git a livin' be mighty careful what we say or do. 'Tain't very pleasant to die with your boots on, an' jest 'cause you pass an opinion, you know. I've heard say that there's some foreign countries in Europe an' Asia where a man don't dare to say what he thinks, but you don't have to go there to find that. Jest come to Four Flush an' you'll find lots that's in ther same boat."

"Well, if that is the case I am more than glad that we struck this camp," retorted Wild. "Missouri Mike has got it in for us, and we are going to stay here just long enough to see him either one of the best men in Wyoming or his body hanging to a tree!"

"Young feller, I like your spirit, but I'm afraid that you've bit off more than you kin chew!"

"Oh, no! Don't think that way. Just you wait. But if you will hustle up that grub you will make it more pleasant for us. I am about famished. I haven't eaten anything since five o'clock this morning."

"Sartinly. Excuse me," and away went the landlord, leaving our friends in the bar-room with two miners, who had been listening to the conversation in a very interested way.

Both the miners looked admiringly at our hero.

"Say," said one of them, "you're nothin' more than a boy, but I kin see that you're a good one. Anyone what kin make a prisoner of Missouri Mike has got to be a good one."

"An' he jumped through ther winder of ther back room of ther ginmill to git away from you, did he?" asked the other. "Well, that is rather surprisin', I do declare."

"Not so very surprisin', either," remarked Cheyenne Charlie. "If he'd staid in ther place he'd have got shot, an' he knowed it."

At this juncture the landlord came out and informed them that their dinner would be ready for them in fifteen minutes.

Then he turned to Wild and said:

"What's your name, if I ain't too inquisitive?"

"Young Wild West," was the retort.

"Oh!"

The two miners looked at each other and nodded.

"We've heard of you," one of them hastened to say.

"No wonder Missouri Mike took water," added the landlord. "Why, your name is known all through ther West, I reckon."

"Well, I don't know about that," said our hero, modestly.

"But it is, though. I never expected Four Flush was goin' to be honored by a visit from you, I kin tell you. But I'm mighty glad, all ther same. An' these two gents is your pards, I reckon?"

"Yes, Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart."

"Well, if I ain't glad to meet you no man was ever glad

of meetin' anyone! You are goin' to stay right here at my shanty jest as long as you like; an' it ain't goin' to cost you a cent, either!"

"Well, we won't stay very long, then," answered Wild. "I always believe in paying for everything I get. I have lots of money, and don't want to be entertained for nothing."

"But you've got to make an exception in this case. You said a little while ago that you was goin' to stay here long enough to see ther finish of ther worst man in Wyoming. That means that you're goin' to be my guests—unless, of course, you find a place you like better."

"Well, we won't quarrel about it," retorted Wild, with a laugh. "I guess your hotel is about as good as any."

"It is the best place in this town," spoke up Egbert. "We stayed here over night when we first landed here in the stagecoach and we were more than satisfied with the way we were treated."

The meal was soon ready and our friends did ample justice to it.

Their horses were given the best of care, and that was something they liked.

Both Young Wild West and his partners always wanted their horses to have all that was coming to them.

After dinner, finding that there was a blacksmith in the town, Wild took his horse over to the shop.

Charlie and Jim thought they had better have their steeds looked after, too, so they went along.

The blacksmith did not show signs of being very busy and was glad to receive some new customers.

"I don't have a whole lot of work yet," he said. "But in a few weeks things will begin to look up. Strangers are comin' here every day, almost, an' that means more trade fur me. I hear that some feller who's got lots of money is goin' to buy up a lot of land here. He's due to-day on ther stagecoach."

"When does the stagecoach get here?" queried our hero.

"She oughter be here inside of half an hour."

It was just about that time when the rumbling of wheels was heard and the next minute the outfit came in sight.

Wild and his partners watched it as it drove up and stopped in front of the High Top Tavern, and they were not a little surprised when they found there were three ladies among the eight or ten passengers to alight.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ROCKERT FAMILY.

"This seems to be a pretty queer sort of a place for ladies to come to," observed Jim Dart, as the stagecoach passengers stood in front of the hotel, and looked around them as though undecided just what to do.

"It ain't much of a place—not jest yet, but we hope to

make a real town out of Four Flush before many moons," answered the blacksmith.

Just as the rather portly man, who was with the ladies, was about to conduct them inside the shanty hotel Missouri Mike and some of his followers appeared on the scene.

The men were more or less under the influence of liquor, and realizing that they were up to some mischief, Wild turned to his partners and said:

"I guess we'll walk back there, boys. The worst man in Wyoming has showed himself again."

The three walked rapidly to the spot.

But before they got there they saw the villains had addressed the passengers.

The portly man stood before them, and the ladies were waiting for him.

"Yes, you're welcome to Four Flush," Missouri Mike was saying. "I'm ther boss of the camp, an' I am ther one as says you're welcome. It don't make any difference what anybody else says, you're welcome. Do you hear what I say?"

"We hear you," answered the man.

"Any man that has ther sand in him to bring ladies here oughter stand treat fur ther boys," the rascal went on. "Mine's real old-fashioned liquor. What yer goin' to have, boys?"

At this juncture Young Wild West stepped before the man, and he jumped back as though he had been touched by a red-hot iron.

"Don't mind what that fellow says, stranger," said Wild in his easy-going way. "I guess he has been drinking a little too much, and he is hardly responsible for what he says or does. Hey, there, landlord! Come out here and show these people to comfortable quarters. They must be tired from the long ride over the mountain."

The worst man in Wyoming turned all colors, while the ladies looked at our hero gratefully.

But Missouri Mike was not going to be downed so easily this time.

"Mine's real old-fashioned liquor, I said!" he bawled out. "Come on, boys!"

He led the way in the bar-room with a rush just as the landlord came out of another door and called for the passengers of the stagecoach to follow him.

Nearly all those who had alighted from the vehicle went in.

They were all strangers, and consequently stopped at the place the outfit had halted at, to seek information, if nothing more.

Only two of them were natives of the Wild West.

The rest were dressed in clothing that signified that they came from the thickly populated cities.

The man with the three ladies seemed very glad when they got inside the big room that was used for dining-room, sitting-room and parlor combined.

"Make yourselves as comfortable as possible," he said to his companions. "I was misled in regard to this town.

I understood that it was quite a civilized place, or I would never have brought you here."

"Oh! Never mind, father," replied the youngest of the three, who was not more than seventeen. "I rather like excitement. Did you notice how that dashing young man with the long hair made that big, rough looking man quail? At first I was frightened, but when the young man stepped up and said what he did I felt entirely different. From what I have seen of Four Flush, father, I rather like it."

"Well, Florence, I am glad to hear you say that. I hope you will like it well enough to be contented for a month. I will have to stay here that long if I carry out my plans."

"Oh, I think we can manage to put up with it that long," spoke up another girl, who was perhaps two years the senior of the first who had spoken. "If Florence likes it I don't see why I shouldn't. I saw some very respectable looking young men outside, as well as the roughs. We must not expect to find things here like they are in Omaha."

"Well, Maud, I am glad you and Florence are satisfied. But how is it with your mother?" and the portly man turned to the elder of the three ladies.

"I shall be contented here so long as the rest of you are," was the reply. "I did not expect to find Four Flush much of a place, so I am but little disappointed."

Richard Rockert, the wealthy speculator from Omaha, shook his head.

"I am more than glad that you seem so satisfied with the town," he said. "But I can't say that I am. It strikes me that it is a very lawless place. I shall have a talk with the dashing looking young fellow who interfered when the rough man accosted me. He looks as though he might know a thing or two."

"Do have a talk with him, father," spoke up the youngest of the girls. "Ask him all about the place, and, father, find out who he is."

"Well, here is the landlord. As soon as I have made arrangements with him about stopping here, I will go out and have a talk with the young man."

It so happened that the landlord had rooms enough to accommodate the family, so arrangements were quickly made and the ladies ascended the rough box stairs to the best apartments the shanty hotel afforded.

Then Rockert followed the landlord to the rear room.

He was going to treat the crowd, for he thought it would be better to show a feeling of friendliness toward them.

"Ah! Here comes the fat tenderfoot!" cried one of the miners. "Now, boys, I reckon we kin name our drinks!"

"That's what you can, boys!" answered Rockert, taking a gold piece from his pocket. "I expect to stay in town a couple of weeks or so, and it may be that I will buy up some of the property that is offered for sale here. That makes it necessary for me to get acquainted with those who live here."

"Well, I'll let you know who I am right away, then," spoke up the big villain who Young Wild West had some-

what tamed. "I'm Missouri Mike, an' I'm ther worst man in Wyoming! I run things my own way in this town—when I take a notion. So look out for me if I happen to get one of my spells on me."

The man was drunk, and in spite of the fact that Young Wild West was standing near, he could not help bragging. Wild did not say anything just then.

He could hardly see the necessity of his interfering, since Missouri Mike was simply acting like an ordinary man who claimed to be "bad."

The capitalist smiled good-naturedly and placed the gold piece on the counter.

"Let them have what they want," he said. "That will pay for it, I guess."

"Yes, an' there'll be some change left," answered the clerk.

"Well, never mind the change."

"That's what I like to hear!" shouted Missouri Mike. "Ther fat tenderfoot seems to be all right, boys."

Once more Rockert smiled.

It was not the first mining camp he had been to, but he did take notice that he had never seen so many tough looking characters in a place of the size of Four Flush.

However, he was going to make the best of it, and as he had received advices that the land was very rich in gold deposits around that section, he meant to buy up some of it and start a smelter going.

He had not been favorably impressed with the idea of bringing his wife and daughters there, but they had coaxed him to let them come, declaring that it would be a pleasant vacation for them.

Wild and his partners walked out to the front of the shanty with Egbert and Beck.

Then Rockert started to follow, but Missouri Mike caught him by the collar.

"Hold on, my fat feller!" he exclaimed. "I reckon it's my turn to treat. I knows a good man when I sees one, an' I always wants to use him right."

This was rather a queer sort of way for the worst man in Wyoming to act, and his followers wondered what he was up to.

They soon found out.

The capitalist took the rough play good-naturedly and stepped up to the bar with him.

As he did so the rascal's left hand, which was around the waist of Rockert, came in contact with the heavy gold watch that was in the pocket of his waistcoat.

Missouri Mike slipped it out and unhooked it from the chain with his finger and thumb.

Then he held it up behind him so his friends could see it, while he patted his victim on the shoulder with the other hand.

"Boys, I reckon I kin afoord to treat, can't I?" he exclaimed.

"I reckon so!" came from the fellow with the rope suspenders, who was right at his elbow.

Neither the proprietor nor the clerk had seen what took

place, but the two who had been there when our friends arrived witnessed the theft.

Though it was not pleasant to him to be hugged by the ruffian, Rockert stood it bravely and drank with him.

Then he went out on the stoop of the hotel, his chain hanging down and his watch gone.

"How are you, young man?" he said, walking up to Wild. "You are just the one I want to talk to. You seem to have considerable prestige around here, and probably you can tell me all about this mining camp."

"Well, I don't know as I can tell you much about it, sir," was the reply. "I only arrived a little over an hour ago."

"What! You are a stranger in Four Flush?"

"Yes, sir, this is the first time I was ever in the place."

"By the way you spoke to that rough fellow when we got out of the stagecoach, I thought you were one of the real residents of the place."

"Oh, no! I hail from Weston, Dakota."

"Ah! From the Black Hills, eh? May I inquire your name? I have heard considerable about the Black Hills, and Weston, also. I was negotiating for some property there with the Wild West Mining & Improvement Company about six months ago. The deal fell through, though, as I thought they wanted too much money for the plot of land. Perhaps you know something of the company."

"Well, I suppose I ought to know considerable about the Wild West Mining & Improvement company, since I am the treasurer of it."

"Well, well! That beats all! Then you are Young Wild West?"

"Yes, sir, that's who I happen to be."

"I am more than glad to meet you, I assure you. My name is Richard Rockert, and I am from Omaha."

"Ah! I think I have heard something about the deal you were trying to make with the company. Well, I will tell you that you missed it by not buying the property. We sold it for considerably more than you wanted to give, and the parties who bought it would not sell it for three times the amount now. They have put up a regular smelting plant, and have all the modern mining appliances there now. The mine is one of the largest and best paying ones in that section, and all in a few months."

"Is that so? Well, that is wonderful. It is nothing strange that I miss a good bargain now and then. But I have made more good ones than bad, so I can't complain."

"Well, I must say that I have never yet made what I consider a bad bargain," said Wild. "And there are very few I have dealt with who will say that they ever got stuck."

"I am glad to hear that. But introduce me to your friends, won't you? I like the appearance of you all very much, and it does me good when I look at you. Just suppose I had arrived here with my wife and daughters and found none but such fellows as are inside! Introduce me. The quicker I get acquainted with some good people, the better I will feel."

"Well, the tall gentleman is Cheyenne Charlie and the other is Jim Dart. They are my partners, and we stick together through thick and thin. I may as well introduce you to the other two gentlemen from Minneapolis we met this morning. Mr. Egbert and Mr. Beck, Mr. Rockert."

Wild had such an easy way of doing it that they all shook hands and felt that they had known each other much longer.

Then Rockert asked several questions about them all, winding up by declaring that he liked them very much.

The capitalist was out-and-out in expressing himself, and it was easy to believe that he meant what he said.

While they had been talking Wild noticed the chain hanging from the button-hole of his waistcoat.

He thought it proper to call the man's attention to it.

"By jove!" exclaimed Rockert, placing his hand on his pocket and finding his watch was not there. "I have had my pocket picked!"

"What!" said Wild.

"It is a fact. I only looked at my watch as I came through into the bar-room from the other part of the house. That was not more than ten or fifteen minutes ago."

"Then your watch must have been taken from you while you was in ther bar," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie.

At this juncture the two miners who had witnessed the stealing of the watch came out.

One of them whispered something in our hero's ear.

"I know who has got your watch, Mr. Rockert," Wild said. "I'll get it for you in less than two minutes!"

CHAPTER V.

MR. EDWIN GLOUCESTER.

Young Wild West did not wait a second.

He walked right inside and up to the worst man in Wyoming.

"What time is it?" he said, just the vestige of a smile on his face.

The big ruffian gave a start.

He did not know what the question meant first.

But it dawned upon him as quick as a flash.

"It's ten minutes to three," he answered.

"All right. Now, then, if that watch is not in the hand of its owner by eight minutes of three something will happen to you! It may be that you will be one of the best men in Wyoming then, for all dead men are good men, because they can't be bad."

Missouri Mike let his hand slide toward the butt of his revolver.

But as quick as a flash Wild seized him by the wrist.

He gave him such a sharp twist that a cry of pain left the villain's lips.

"Hand that watch to the stout gentleman!" commanded

the boy, his eyes flashing dangerously. "Do as I say, or I'll break your arm!"

The capitalist was just coming in at the door, and he stepped up to get his timepiece.

Missouri Mike made an effort to break away, but Wild gave him another turn, and down he dropped upon his knees.

"Here it is!" he cried. "Let up, won't yer? You caught me foul."

As Rockert took his watch, Wild gave the man's wrist one more twist and then let go of him.

A scream of pain left his lips and he fell to the floor. At first our hero thought he had broken his arm, but he soon found out different.

Missouri Mike sprang to his feet with remarkable quickness and shook himself like a dog coming out of water.

"I ain't goin' to shoot at yer, Young Wild West!" he bawled out in an angry tone. "But I'm goin' ter show you that I kin handle yer—an' a dozen like yer, if I wanted to."

"All right. Jump in!" was the calm retort.

The ruffian did not wait for a second invitation.

He leaped forward with amazing quickness and tried to catch the boy about the waist.

But quick as he was, he was not quick enough to get his clutch upon Young Wild West.

Wild jumped nimbly aside and threw out his left foot.

At the same instant he let his hand come down upon the man's neck with full force.

The result was all he expected.

The worst man in Wyoming fell flat upon the floor.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Wild, tantalizingly. "Why don't you keep on your feet? You can't hurt anyone that way."

"I know you're a sundowner, but I ain't done yet," was the reply. "I'll jest lam it into you good when I do get hold of you."

"Well, don't waste your time, is my advice. I am not going to let you get hold of me."

The boy was as calm as a summer morning, and those who had never seen him in action before, looked at him in amazement.

There were three or four in the place who looked as though they would like to take a hand in the game, but Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart were watching them like a cat watches a mouse, and they knew it.

The cowardly rascals were afraid to interfere.

As soon as Missouri Mike got on his feet he changed his tactics somewhat.

He danced back in rude imitation of a boxer, and began feinting with his hands.

"Oh! You want to make a fist fight of it, do you?" remarked Wild. "Well, here goes!"

Then he sailed into him and hit him two stunning blows in the face before he knew what was taking place. Biff!

He gave him another in the pit of the stomach, and as

the big villain doubled up in the act of sitting down, he let him have a left hook on the jaw bone.

"Oh!"

With a gasp Missouri Mike went in a heap to the floor.

He was knocked out completely, and no one knew it better than Wild did himself.

"Now, then," said he, turning to the other rascals in the place, "if any of you want a taste of the medicine I gave your friend, just say so. I'm just itching to give the whole lot of you a thrashing!"

The man with the rope suspenders was just enough under the influence of liquor to be reckless.

He grabbed for his revolver and succeeded in getting it from his belt.

But that was as far as he got.

Crack!

Not one in the room knew exactly how it was done so quickly, but Young Wild West got his revolver on a line with the villain's hand and fired.

As the report rang out the weapon dropped from his grasp and the scoundrel danced wildly about the floor, the blood spurting from the end of his forefinger.

Crack!

Wild fired again and one of the improvised suspenders that held the man's trousers let go.

Crack!

The other side went.

"There!" exclaimed our hero. "Now, go on out and get a new pair of suspenders! Hurry, or I'll shoot the shirt right off your back!"

It was really wonderful to see how quickly the man got out of the room.

And when he reached the sandy street he ran with the speed of a deer.

Wild walked out after him and joined in the laugh that went up.

"Young Wild West, you are the most wonderful man I ever saw!" exclaimed Rockert.

"Don't say that. I am not a man yet," was the reply. "I am only a boy."

"If that is ther case, I don't know what you'll be when you git to be a man, then," spoke up one of the miners.

Wild laughed.

"I must have a great way about me, I suppose," he remarked. "Still, I don't think it is anything wonderful. It is no trouble for me to do what I accomplished. Anyone could do the same."

"Not much!" exclaimed the proprietor of the house.

"Oh, yes! All you want is a little coolness. That is the main thing, though one must be quick and have a very watchful eye. I may be quicker than a great many, but anyone could be as cool, if they tried to."

"No, they couldn't. It is impossible for some people to be cool under trying circumstances," said the capitalist. Ah! Here comes Mr. Missouri Mike. He has recovered."

"What time is it?" asked Cheyenne Charlie, as the vil-

lain came out, rubbing his eyes as though he had just awakened from a sound slumber.

Everyone laughed except the close friends of the man.

"Never you mind!" he retorted with a hiss. "You kin jest bet that I'm ther boss of this camp yet. One or two lickin's won't affect me in ther least."

"All right," answered Wild. "But just mind your eye. You know what I told you up near the rapids."

The whole band of bad men proceeded over to the saloon they made their headquarters in, and then the capitalist invited our friends in the house.

They all accepted the invitation, and then an introduction to the ladies took place.

Wild was very modest in explaining how he had defeated the two rascals in the bar-room, and when Egbert and Beck began lauding him to the skies and telling how much he had done for them that day, he advised them to go it a little easier.

The two girls seemed to take very much to the young men from Minneapolis.

They declared that they had no idea that they would meet any young men who were tenderfeet in the mining town.

And it was the same with the young men.

Neither of them had sweethearts, and they were more than favorably impressed with the girls.

The conversation drifted from one thing to another, and finally Maud Rockert spoke about a good looking young man with a rather dark skin, who had been one of the passengers to come over in the stagecoach with them.

She stated that he had tried his best to get into conversation with her on the way, and that when she repulsed him, he declared that she might be glad to make friends with him before she left Four Flush.

After that he had ignored her entirely, and she dismissed him from her mind.

Her parents and sister were much surprised when she related this.

"Why did you not tell me of this at the time, Maud?" her father asked.

"Oh! I did not want to create a scene in the stage-coach," she replied. "I was not at all afraid of him."

While they were talking over the matter, who should come into the room but the man himself.

He was not more than twenty-five, and was dressed after the style of a gentlemanly sport of the West.

"Beg pardon, ladies and gentlemen," he observed. "The landlord tells me that this is the only public parlor he has, so I came in."

The capitalist frowned, but a warning glance from Wild made him change his manner.

"I am sure we have no objections to any guest of the house coming in here," he said.

"Thank you. I am used to being in good company, and that is hardly to be found in the bar-room."

He smiled and showed an even set of teeth, set between a pair of thin lips that gave him a sinister look.

Before he sat down he handed each of the occupants of the room a card.

Wild read the one he handed him and found that it bore the name of Edwin Gloucester.

There was nothing left to do but for Rockert to introduce the party, so he did so, though it was not with very good grace.

"So you are Young Wild West, then?" said the young man, looking at our hero rather curiously.

"Yes, that happens to be my name," was the rejoinder.

"I have read considerable about you in the Denver newspapers."

"Yes?"

"You are a wonder in your way, so I believe. You have broken up more bands of road agents and hunted down more bad Indians than one could count on his fingers and toes, according to reports."

"Well, I have never bothered about keeping an account of them," laughed Wild. "It is possible that you may have read a whole lot about me that is not true."

"Possibly. But there must be some truth in the statements. Newspapers are not in the habit of giving folks such puffs, unless——"

He paused and looked at the rest of the company with a curious smile.

"Unless what?" asked Wild.

"Unless they are pretty well paid for. I hear that you are worth over a million dollars."

"Yes, I am worth that much, I guess," our hero answered, keeping as cool as possible. "But I never paid any of it to a newspaper for giving me a puff. I am not in that line of business, sir."

"Oh, I suppose not. I read an account of how you broke a faro bank in Denver once. Is that true?"

"No, that is not true. Where did you read it?"

"In a Denver paper."

"Well, I never broke a faro bank there, but I came mighty near breaking a man's head there, though."

"Is that so?" and Gloucester arched his eye-brows in surprise.

"Yes."

"How was it? Won't you tell us about it, Young Wild West?"

"Yes, I'll tell you how it was. A young man, something after your pattern got to saying things that I did not like, and I got a little mad and picked him up and threw him out of the room on his head. If he had struck just a little harder than he did his head would have been broken sure."

"Oh! You don't tell us that!"

"Yes, I do tell you that. Do you want me to show you how I did it?"

"Well, yes."

Gloucester braced himself, knowing exactly what was coming.

He was a pretty cool hand; there was no mistaking it.

That he was doing his best to pick a row with the daring young deadshot every one present knew.

There was a window right behind the fellow, but it was closed.

One glance from Wild and Cheyenne Charlie stepped over and raised it.

Then with a smile Young Wild West put out his left hand.

CHAPTER VI.

TWO BETS ARE MADE.

As Wild put out his hand he simply did it for a bluff. He tried to make Gloucester think that he meant to grab hold of him.

The movement was a successful one, for the sporty young man dodged with great quickness and followed by making a feint at Wild.

Then the two grappled.

Young Wild West got the hold he always liked to get in a case of that kind.

He had done it so often that he never missed when he tried for it.

It was a left hold about the neck and a right about the legs.

With the two hands in such a position an ordinary strong man can throw a person much heavier than he over his head, providing he uses his hip for a fulcrum.

Wild just knew to do it.

Gloucester had caught him about the waist, but when he felt his heels going into the air, he involuntarily let go his hold to catch himself.

The very instant he let go he went flying through space. Crash!

His heels hit the upper sash in the window and carried it away.

Then he landed on his head and shoulders upon the stoop.

"Please excuse me, ladies," said Wild, speaking as calmly as though he was simply going out for a moment. "I am quite a student of human nature, and I am certain Mr. Gloucester came in here for the purpose of picking a row with me. At any rate, he said enough to warrant my resenting it. I will go out and see if he is satisfied."

Mrs. Rockert and her daughter were very pale, but there was a look of delight in their eyes, for all that.

Admiration was bound to crop up.

Young Wild West got out on the stoop just as the young man was picking himself up in a dazed manner.

Those in the bar-room came rushing out at the same time.

They did not know what it meant.

But they understood that Young Wild West had thrown

a man through the window when they saw the broken sash.

"I will pay the damage done to the window, landlord," said Wild. "I am sorry it happened, but it could not be helped."

Before the landlord could make a reply Gloucester uttered a growl like that of a wounded panther.

He shook his finger at Wild and exclaimed:

"I will get even with you, Young Wild West, before you are forty-eight hours older! I will have your life!"

"See here," said Wild, coolly. "When a man talks to me that way, he has either got to fight it out or take a thrashing. Which do you want to do?"

"Neither, just now," was the reply. "I am simply telling you what is going to happen to you."

"Well, since you have threatened my life, I may as well take yours!"

Out came our hero's revolver.

But he had no intention of killing the man.

He simply meant to show him that he knew how to shoot.

Crack!

As the report rang out, a corner of the stand-up collar on Gloucester's neck disappeared.

Crack!

The other corner went.

Gloucester was very pale, but he did not move an inch.

He knew very well that the dashing boy had not tried to kill him.

"Are you going to have my life?" asked Wild.

"I am!" was the reply. "Before you are forty-eight hours older, too. You threw me out of that window when you had no cause for it. Unless you shoot me dead now I will surely have your life! I am a man of my word."

"You think you are. Well, I will tell you what I will do; I'll wager a thousand dollars that I am alive forty-eight hours from now."

"I will take the bet."

"Put up the money in the hands of the landlord."

The young man did not hesitate an instant, but promptly produced a roll of bills from his pocket.

"There is a thousand dollar bill," said he, as he held it up for all to see it. "I am quite a ways from being a beggar, gentlemen."

"That makes you no better," said Wild. "If you had a hundred thousand dollar bills you would be no better than you are now. Money is a very fine thing to have, but it don't make the character of a man."

"Well, you will know all about my character before I am through with you, Young Wild West."

"Yes, I believe that. Well, here is the money to cover that bill of yours. Take the time, landlord."

"Just one minute past four," replied the hotel keeper, looking at his watch.

"Good! Now the understanding is that if I am alive forty-eight hours from now I come and get the stake money from you."

"That's it exactly!" exclaimed Gloucester, smiling blandly.

"All right," said Glover. "I reckon I understand. But don't you think this is a queer sort of a bet, gents?"

"It is a queer sort of a bet," answered Wild. "I would be justified in filling the sneaking scoundrel with holes for threatening to kill me inside of forty-eight hours, but I am not the sort to do that. I will wait until he undertakes to carry out his threat. Then I will show him something."

"But what you show him, Wild, won't do a bit of good, for he'll never live to make use of it," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie.

"Well, that might be, too. But he will have a chance to see me get the drop on him, just the same."

"Well, let it go at that," retorted Gloucester, coolly, as he walked away.

"I don't see how you can keep from shooting that fellow, Wild," observed Jim Dart.

"Well, never mind. This is something new that I have had happen to me. Just wait! It will come out all right."

Gloucester went direct to the saloon where the bad gang had gone.

His fancy clothing were dusty and musty from the fall he had at the hands of our hero, and when he entered the place he created just the small part of a sensation.

"Gentlemen, I am Edwin Gloucester, of Cheyenne, and I make my living at gambling. Step up and wet your whistles!" he cried.

There was a short silence, and then Missouri Mike blurted out:

"How did you get mussed up, stranger?"

"Oh! I don't mind telling you. A boy over at the hotel threw me out of the window, that's all," was the calm reply. "I never deny anything, you know."

"I'll bet I know who ther boy was!" exclaimed the man who had the rope suspenders.

"Quite likely. It was the same fellow who shot your suspenders loose, my friend."

"Young Wild West!" gasped Missouri Mike.

"Yes, it was Young Wild West, gentlemen. But come! Let's have some of the best tanglefoot you have in the house, landlord. I am not a regular drinking man, but after what happened a few minutes ago, I think I need a little stimulant. I thought I could handle Young Wild West, but I couldn't, and I am not ashamed to own up to it."

The liquor was placed on the bar, and the whole crowd drank the health of Edwin Gloucester, of Cheyenne.

The fact of his being roughly handled by Young Wild West made the men have a little sympathy for him.

Every man of them was opposed to the daring young deadshot, just because he had taken the Worst Man in Wyoming down a few pegs.

"Now, gentlemen, I want to tell you of a bet I made with Young Wild West after he threw me through the win-

dow. I bet him a thousand dollars even that he would be dead inside of forty-eight hours!"

"You done what?" cried Missouri Mike.

"I bet him a thousand dollars that he would not be alive forty-eight hours from now."

"Did you put up ther money?"

"I did. It is in the hands of the landlord of the hotel."

"An' did Young Wild West put up his money?"

"Oh, yes!"

"That's funny, ain't it, boys?"

"You bet!" came the response from half a dozen of them.

"Why is it funny?" asked Gloucester.

"It's funny that he let you live," answered Missouri Mike. "Ther bet means that you're goin' to drop him afore ther time is up."

"Exactly. Either I will drop him or somebody else will. It makes no particular difference who does it. But he has got to be dead by that time in order for me to win my bet."

"I like your nerve, young man. But I'm just goin' to offer to make a little bet with you, if you don't mind. I'm Missouri Mike, ther worst man in Wyoming, an' when I says a thing I means it."

"Good! Now what is the bet you want to make?"

"Hold on a minute! I want you to understand that I like you putty well, from what I've seen of yer. I want you to know, too, that I hate Young Wild West worse nor a rattlesnake. I'm goin' to drop him ther minute I gits ther chance. But I've got an idea that ther chance ain't goin' ter come inside of forty-eight hours. I bet ther way I think, always, so I'll jest bet you a thousand that if you try to down Young Wild West, so's you kin win ther bet, you'll be dead inside of forty-eight hours, instead of him."

"I certainly have got to take that bet!" retorted Gloucester, smiling as though he was simply staking his money on a horse race, instead of his life. "I have just one more one thousand dollar bill in this roll. Here it is."

"Put it up in ther hands of ther boss of ther place."

"All right. Get your own money out."

"Oh, I've got a thousand, but not much more, either. There's ther dust. Jest hold it fur us, Bill. Ther day day after to-morrer at four o'clock, or a little after, one of us will come to claim it."

"That's right," nodded Gloucester.

"You said you made a livin' by gamblin'," said one of the men a minute or so later. "What's your favorite game?"

"Oh, I've got a French game that I play the most. It is one of the most simple you ever saw, and it is as square as a die."

"S'pose you show us it," suggested the proprietor.

"Certainly. Come over to the table."

As calmly as though he had never made such a thing as a bet on his life, Gloucester took a seat.

The owner of the saloon produced a new pack of cards and handed them to him.

"Now then, gentlemen, I will deal hands to six of us, and then I will show you the game. After that, if anyone wants to take a hand in it we will play. Now, I will deal you each five cards, one at a time, the same as draw poker."

He did so, and all picked up their cards.

"This game," resumed the gambler, "is played something like euchre, but you make your bets before a card is led. Now, I will turn up a trump, which I failed to do when I placed the cards on the table. Ah! the deuce of hearts. Hearts are trumps, gentlemen. Now the game is for each man to figure out how many sure tricks he has in his hand. Then he makes his bets and places the amount on the board. The next thing he does is to call out the number of tricks he feels sure of taking. When all have made their bets and called out their tricks or dropped out, which they have the privilege of doing by placing a dollar on the board to enlarge the pot, the game begins. We will play a hand just for the fun of it now, and then you will get a better idea of it."

They were all very well acquainted with cards, and they caught on to the game right away.

It so happened that Missouri Mike took in three tricks, which was the number he named, and he won the hand.

"That's what I call a putty good game," he said. "S'pose we have a few hands if it fur fair?"

"All right," replied Gloucester, as he took off his hat and smoothed his hair. "I would just as leave play as not from now until supper time."

There were only two beside Missouri Mike who were willing to come in the game.

They declared that they wanted to see a few hands played first, so they could get a better idea of it.

The four started in.

The cards were cut and one of the men got the deal and turned up the ace of clubs.

Gloucester had the first say.

"I will bet ten dollars," he said, and he put the money on the table. "I am going to take three tricks."

"An' I'll meet the bet. I'm goin' ter take three tricks."

The other two put in a dollar apiece and dropped out.

As there could only be five tricks taken, either one of the other of the players would not be able to take three tricks.

But they both figured it out that they could, and that is what makes the game.

The result was that Missouri Mike got the three first tricks and he won the money.

Gloucester picked up the cards to deal again, when who should come in but Young Wild West.

They had concluded to follow Gloucester and let him know that they were in nowise worried over his threat.

Another thing, Wild thought it was a good idea to let Missouri Mike and his gang know that he meant business.

"Ah!" exclaimed Gloucester with a bland smile, when he saw our hero enter the place. "You are just in time to take a hand in the game that I have introduced."

"What is the game?" asked Wild, coolly stepping up to the table.

"It is a French game, but I have forgotten the name of it. Watch us play a hand or two and I think you will thoroughly understand it."

"All right. Go ahead and play."

Wild could hardly understand the way of the gambler.

He certainly was as cool a personage as he had ever met.

He had not the least doubt that the villain was a quick shot with the revolver, and he was watching him all the time.

He would have to be a good one to get ahead of Young Wild West.

Our hero knew that as well as anyone.

There were at least a dozen men in the saloon who were ready and willing to make short work of Wild and his two partners, but they dared not start a fight and attempt to do it.

They all valued their lives too highly for that.

Yet they were simply waiting for a chance when they would run the risk.

His wonderful display of nerve was what got the best of them.

He was the last person they expected to see come into the saloon just then.

And when he stepped up and began watching the game of cards they were impressed still more by his coolness and daring.

Wild watched them play three or four hands and saw into the game quite readily.

It was a very simple one, anyhow.

It struck him to take a hand in it and try the nerve of the smooth-tongued gambler, who had wagered a thousand dollars that he would be dead inside of forty-eight hours.

"I'll take a hand, if you don't object," he said, looking at Gloucester.

"I am sure no one will object," was the quick reply. "It isn't every man who can sit down in the game with a man they know has got to die inside of forty-eight hours."

"That is right," nodded Wild, smilingly.

He knew Charlie and Jim were keeping a sharp watch behind his back, and that made him apparently very careless.

But Wild knew just what he was doing.

The first hand was played and he won.

But the stakes were not so very large, so it did not amount to a great deal.

It was Gloucester's deal now, and when he turned the trump it proved to be the tray of hearts.

CHAPTER VII.

GLOUCESTER IS BEATEN AT HIS OWN GAME.

Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart were with Young Wild West when he entered the saloon.

As in euchre, the dealer had the option of picking up the trump and discarding a card or turning it down.

If he turned it down the man next to him could make it to suit his hand or pass, as he saw fit.

Wild looked at his hand and saw that he had the ace, king, queen and jack of diamonds and the ace of clubs.

It was a fine hand in case the dealer gave him a chance to make the trump.

Gloucester had dealt the hand to Wild purposely.

He had given him four diamonds and a club, but he had taken five diamonds himself.

That would give Wild four tricks and him one.

The gambler made out that he was studying his hand for a moment and then turned it down.

"Are you going to make the trump?" he asked, looking at our hero.

"Yes," was the quick reply.

"How many tricks are you going to take?"

"The whole five."

Gloucester drew his roll from his pocket.

"I'll just wager a thousand that you don't!" he exclaimed in a matter-of-fact way.

Young Wild West hesitated a moment and looked at his hand.

"I'll bet you!" he said.

The money was put up and the other players threw down their hands.

"What is the trump?" asked Gloucester, smiling and showing his teeth like a cat about to pounce on a rat.

"Clubs!"

Wild realized that the man had put up a job on him, so he chose the solitary club for a trump instead of the four diamonds.

A look of amazement came over the face of the gambler.

"What did you say?" he queried; "diamonds?"

"No! Clubs are trumps."

Gloucester turned all colors.

It was the first time he had lost his composure since he came to Four Flush.

Even when he had been thrown through the window he had not appeared to be as much disturbed as he was now.

"There is the trump!" went on our hero, as he threw down the ace of clubs. "Play on it."

His opponent evidently decided to play the hand out.

He had no clubs, so he threw on one of his diamonds.

Wild took the trick and then led the ace of diamonds.

He took that trick, of course, and so it was with all the rest, Gloucester following suit each time with a card of a smaller denomination.

Our hero picked up the money and placed it in his pocket.

"That is a very good game, Mr. Gloucester," he said, coolly rising from the table. "The next time you stack the cards, with the intention of having diamonds trumps, leave out the ace of clubs and put a smaller diamond in the place of it. It is a bad card to hold against you!"

"Young Wild West, you are a fiend!"

"Oh, no! Don't call me any such names as that. You are a tricky scoundrel, and about as cool a one as I have ever met. But I am going to beat you out on the bet we made, and don't make any mistake about it!"

"You never will do that."

"Why don't you shoot me now?"

"I'll take my time about that."

"I dare you to touch your hand to the butt of your shooter!"

Wild was getting a little mad now.

He knew it was either going to be his life or Gloucester's before the forty-eight hours were up, and he thought it might just as well be settled now as any other time.

It was a good time to do it, since Missouri Mike and his gang were right at hand to learn a lesson from the result.

But the gambler would not touch his revolver.

"If you shoot me, Young Wild West, you have got to do it when I am not trying to defend myself," he said, all his calmness having returned to him.

"And when you shoot me it will be when I am not looking, I suppose?"

"Possibly."

This was exasperating.

Here was a cool villain declaring that he was going to take the life of the boy at the first opportunity, and yet he would not so much as say he would fight him on even terms.

"I have never yet shot a man unless I had to," said our hero, keeping his temper well under control. "I am not going to shoot you unless I have to. But I tell you what I will do."

"What will you do?"

"I will go out in the middle of the street and place my back against yours, and when someone gives the word, walk five paces and then turn around and shoot at you—providing, of course, that you will shoot at me."

"I will agree to that proposition."

Missouri Mike and his followers looked at each other.

They knew in their hearts that Gloucester would fire at his opponent before he had stepped five paces.

They had seen enough of him to believe that he would shoot the instant he could turn around.

But they were not the only ones who thought this way.

Wild and his partners felt certain that the gambler meant to act treacherously.

But they did not mean that he should be allowed to.

Wild led the way outside the shanty and everybody followed.

"Come out here," he said. "There is no need of having any delay about it."

"I'm coming," was the reply. "Who is going to give the word for us to begin the duel?"

"Anyone you like can do that. Let someone fire a shot from his revolver when we get back to back, and then we'll take five paces and wheel around and begin firing."

"I'll fire ther shot to start ther thing goin'," spoke up the man nearest our hero.

"Afore you begin," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie, drawing both his revolvers and folding his hands across his breast, "I want to say somethin'. It's jest this: Gloucester, if you go to firin' afore you've made five steps, I'll drop you dead in your tracks!"

A hush came over the gang.

The gambler turned pale and shrugged his shoulders.

"Git ready! I'm goin' to give ther signal!" cried the miner, pulling his revolver from his belt.

Jim Dart saw that instead of holding the muzzle of the weapon in the air, he had it leveled right at Wild.

Just as the villain was going to pull the trigger he knocked the revolver from his hand.

Then one of the gang fired a shot and the bullet cut a lock of hair from Jim's head.

Crack!

It was Cheyenne Charlie's revolver that spoke this time.

Down went the man who had fired the cowardly shot.

Crack!

Another, who was in the act of shooting at Charlie, dropped.

Jim had returned the favor the scout did for him.

"Hold on, boys!" bawled the worst man in Wyoming. "Don't shoot any more. There's no use in cleanin' out ther camp in such a hurry."

"That's what I say," spoke up Gloucester, and then he deliberately turned and started for the saloon.

Wild was so much put out by this action that he let two shots go at the gambler.

One of the bullets grazed his ear and the other hit the heel of his shoe.

"There is no fight in you, you treacherous cur!" he cried. "If you are not out of my sight inside of a second I'll send a bullet through your heart!"

Gloucester made a leap and got into the saloon in a jiffy.

Young Wild West looked around at the crowd that had gathered and smiled.

"Gentlemen, are you all satisfied?" he asked.

There was no reply.

"Silence gives consent, they say, so I guess you are. If any of you want to see me you will find me over at the hotel. Four Flush is what I call a red-hot mining camp, but I don't suppose I have seen things in full blast yet. To-night things will begin to hum around here, I have no doubt."

He started off, but paused and turned when he had taken a few steps.

"Missouri Mike!" he called out.

"What?" came from the worst man in Wyoming.

"I am of the opinion that this camp is not big enough to hold the two of us. You had better take a sneak while you have the chance."

"I reckon seven million such fellers as you are couldn't drive me away from here!" was the reply.

"All right. We'll hang you to the limb of a tree, then, just as soon as we find out for certain that you shot the guide."

Then the bad gang began making all sorts of remarks, using profane language and calling our friends all sorts of names.

They thought they could take the risk of doing it now, since they had turned to go back to the hotel.

And they knew pretty well that they would not come back and start to shooting.

Cheyenne Charlie, however, wanted to go back.

"Never mind, Charlie," said Wild. "You and Jim dropped two of them. That will do for now."

"But Missouri Mike an' that feller who calls himself Gloucester, ought to go under, Wild," the scout insisted.

"I know they had, but neither of them will fight."

"All right. Jest as you say about it."

"Well, I say come to the hotel."

"That settles it."

They went to the hotel without another word, and after finding that their horses were well provided for in the shed back of the building, they washed up and took seats on the front stoop with Egbert and Beck, who had just left the two girls, after a long chat with them.

CHAPTER VIII.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

When Missouri Mike finally entered the saloon, after he saw that Young Wild West and his partners were not coming back, Gloucester called him aside.

"See here," the gambler said. "I understand that you are the boss of this camp."

"That is right."

"If you don't look out Young Wild West will take your place."

"No, he won't."

"Well, he is trying to, anyway."

"Well, before to-morrow mornin' Young Wild West will be dead!"

"You mean to kill him, then?"

"I certainly do."

"Well, all right. But if you miss doing it I will do it before the forty-eight hours are up."

"I reckon you won't git ther chance."

"Well, perhaps I won't. But say! Why can't we work together in this game? To tell you the truth, I am one of the worst men that ever lived. I've committed enough crimes to hang me half a dozen times, and I want to live to commit more. But I am willing to admit that I am afraid of Young Wild West. I have heard all about him, and, I tell you he can't be downed very easy. It will take more than you alone, or me alone to do it. We both have

had chances this afternoon to shoot him in the back, but why didn't we do it?"

"I don't know," and Missouri Mike shrugged his shoulders and acted as though the question was a puzzler.

"Well, now I will tell you a game that I am going to work. It will help along the other, too."

"What other?"

"The disposing of Young Wild West."

"Well, jest tell me about it."

"There are two fine looking young ladies over at the hotel."

"Yes, so I heard some of the gang say."

"I am deeply in love with one of them, and I want her for my wife."

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed the worst man in Wyoming.

The remark sounded very comical to him.

"It is no laughing matter," went on the gambler. "Probably you are past getting in love with a woman, but I am not."

"I likes all wimmen, I does. I ain't never had any love fur any particular one, 'thout it was my mother."

"Don't mention mother now. We are talking on a different subject."

"But a feller is bound to think of his mother once in a while. If I'd stuck to what I told her I was goin' to do when I left home, I'd be a better man than I am now."

"Stop!" cried Gloucester, fiercely. "Don't talk that way again."

Missouri Mike looked at him in amazement.

They had the back room of the saloon all to themselves, and the gambler had risen from his chair, his eyes blazing.

"What's ther matter with yer?"

"Don't mention the word mother again—do you hear?"

"Well, I'll be blowed!"

"Never mind now. I'll say this much, it makes me feel bad when such talk is going on in my presence. I want to forget that I ever had a home or anything else."

"All right, then. Jest tell me what you was goin' to. Lemme see. It was ther gals at ther hotel that you was talking about last, wasn't it?"

"Yes, that's right. Well, as I said, I am in love with one of the girls."

"Yes."

"I am going to kidnap her from the hotel to-night, if I can get anyone to help me."

"Why not take ther two of 'em?"

"That could be done, too."

"Of course it kin. I'll help yer. An' I know a bully place ter take 'em where no one couldn't find 'em in a month."

"Good! You are just the man I want to see, then. I have got plenty of money, and if you help me kidnap those girls away, I'll give you a thousand dollars."

"All right, boss; it's a go!"

"If we get the girls away from the hotel the chances are that Young Wild West and his partners will go out in search of them."

"Oh! You kin bet on that."

"Well, when they go out they must not be allowed to get back alive."

"Certainly not!" and the worst man in Wyoming shook his head.

"I'll figure out a way to get the girls. I am going over to the hotel pretty soon, and I will have a chance to find out how things are arranged there."

"You're goin' over to ther hotel putty soon?" asked Missouri Mike in surprise.

"Why, certainly. I engaged two days' board there, and I paid for it in advance."

"But Young Wild West is there."

"I know he is. But he won't bother me, because I won't bother him."

"He was putty mad at you one time there."

"I know that. But there is too much honor in Young Wild West for him to shoot a man unless the man is trying to shoot first. That boy is one out of a thousand."

"Then you must be one out of a million," and the big villain laughed.

"It wouldn't do for everybody to be unprincipled scoundrels, like you and I."

"You're the first man I ever heard call himself a scoundrel."

"Well, what's the use of trying to deny it? I make my living by gambling, stealing and killing, when it is necessary. What else am I?"

"That's so. How many men do you want to help in ther game of stealin' ther gals?"

"It will take three or four, anyhow. Have you got that many who can be depended upon?"

"I reckon I have. Any man in ther gang will do jest as I say, an' he won't say a word, either."

"All right. I will go over to the hotel now, and I'll be back right after supper and let you know all about how the thing is to be done. The girl I want snubbed me putty badly coming over in the stagecoach, but I'll wager that she will be glad to talk a different way before long."

"So you're goin' to marry her, then?"

"Just as soon as I can find a clergyman who will do the job."

"S'pose I marry ther other one?"

The gambler looked at the ugly face of the worst man in Wyoming and shook his head.

"I don't know about that. You might scare her to death before the clergyman could tie the knot."

"Do you mean 'cause I'm sich a homely piece of goods?"

"Yes."

"See here! If it was anyone else but you talkin' that way, I'd bore 'em full of holes."

"Well, I was only telling you the truth."

"Mebbe you was, but a man don't always like to hear ther truth."

"It's the same way with being a scoundrel."

"Yes, but a good lookin' scoundrel makes a finer appearance than a homely one."

"Of course. But we are getting away off the subject. I'll be back after supper."

"All right."

"You're a queer galoot, you are," muttered Missouri Mike, as Gloucester walked over to the hotel with an air of extreme carelessness. "You think you're putty smart, but you'll find out that you ain't. I'm goin' to let you go jest so far, an' then you'll disappear all of a sudden like. Ther black hole with ther bottom is ther place where you'll fetch up! Lemme see! I've got to git rid of Young Wild West, his two partners, ther two fellers I was goin' to give a free ride down ther rapids and Gloucester. That makes six that's got to go, 'cause they'll ruin ther camp if they stay here very long, an' then I wouldn't be ther boss any more."

The more the villain thought over it the more he became convinced that the six he had enumerated should die. He wanted the two tenderfeet out of the way just for spite.

Young Wild West and his two partners and Gloucester were the only ones he feared out of the six, and he considered that he had more than sufficient cause to dispose of them.

He went out in the bar and had a few drinks with some of his special cronies.

One of these was the fellow who had worn the rope suspenders.

His name was Juggs, and he really was willing to almost die for the worst man in Wyoming.

And Missouri Mike could make him do just as he liked.

That was why he took so much stock in Juggs.

But Juggs was not a fool by any means.

He had received a pretty fair education and his brain was pretty well balanced.

Whiskey had brought him down to the level of the worst class that infested the mines of the Wild West.

"Juggs," said Missouri Mike, "I want to tell you somethin'."

"All right," was the reply.

"Let's go where we kin have a talk in private."

"Very well."

They went into the back room just vacated by Gloucester, and then Mike told Juggs all that had been talked over.

He even told him what his thoughts were after the gambler left.

"I kin see what it would turn out to if Gloucester was to be let live," said Juggs. "He's a putty cool hand, an' it wouldn't be long afore he'd rule ther roost."

"Yes, an' then you must remember that I bet him a thousand dollars that he'd be ther one to die afore ther forty-eight hours were up, instead of Young Wild West."

"Didn't he say nothin' about that when he was talkin' about this kidnappin' business?"

"Not a word."

"That's funny."

"He was talkin' about killin' Young Wild West, too. I forgot about it myself, I reckon, 'cause I was telling him

I was goin' to drop Young Wild West afore to-morrer mornin'."

"No wonder he didn't say anything about ther bet, then. You would simply make him win ther bet if you killed ther boy afore ther time was up."

"Oh! I don't know about that."

"Why don't you?"

"Well, Gloucester could die, too, couldn't he?"

"Oh, yes! But I think it would be best to let Young Wild West down him, an' then we kin down Young Wild West."

"That's your advice, hey?"

"Yes. One or the other of them will have to go under before forty-eight hours is up, that's putty certain."

"I think so myself."

"Well, we'll help Gloucester git them two gals, anyhow."

"Yes, an' we'll take them to ther cave two miles up ther mountain near where Young Wild West caught me after I'd shot ther guide an' was goin' to finish ther tenderfeet in an original way."

Missouri Mike laughed as he said this.

"Yes, an' ther black hole with no bottom will be ther place where them what comes to look fur ther gals will go!" exclaimed Juggs.

"Right you are, pard."

The miners went to their various shanties and tents for supper a few minutes later.

But Missouri Mike and Juggs picked out the ones they wanted to help them that night, and they were told to be at the saloon early.

It was near eight o'clock when Edwin Gloucester sauntered from the hotel and came to the saloon.

He had on a different suit of clothes, and was smoking a big black cigar.

He found Missouri Mike waiting for him.

"Where can we go to have a quiet talk?" he asked. "I see the back room is occupied."

"We kin go over to ther shanty," was the reply.

"Very well."

"Wait! I'll pass ther word fur them what's goin' to take part in ther kidnappin' game to be there as soon as it is dark."

"Yes, we want them by that time, for I have arranged things so the two girls must be taken shortly after dark."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. I'll tell you all about it as soon as we get to the shanty."

A few minutes later they were seated around a rickety table in the shanty occupied by Missouri Mike.

There were six of them—villains all!

"I have arranged to have the hotel take fire at eight o'clock to-night," said Gloucester, coolly. "In the excitement that follows you men are to take the girls and make off with them. Here is a vial of chloroform and a sponge. In five minutes the fire will start, so get ready!"

CHAPTER IX.

TWO GIRLS ARE MISSING.

Young Wild West and his two partners left the hotel to take a walk through the mining camp at precisely the same time that Missouri Mike and his men went out of the back of the saloon to get to the rear of the hotel without being seen.

It was dark, so the villains did not see our friends as they came down the single street.

Wild wanted to see the first of the inhabitants of the town and learn whether there were any more of the stamp of Missouri Mike's followers or not.

There was another saloon, which was not quite as large as the other, but was well patronized, for all that.

Our friends had not yet visited this place, so they headed for it when they left the hotel.

They had just reached it and found about fifteen miners inside and in front of the saloon, when some one called out that one of the shanties was on fire.

Of course our friends were interested when they heard this.

None of the shanties were large ones, with the exception of the hotel they were stopping at, and they knew the blaze could not possibly be a very large one.

But no matter how small the building was, the fire was bound to make an excitement.

The men ran wildly about and asked where the fire was.

But they were not long in finding out, for presently a bright red glare burst in view and a thick column of black smoke went skyward.

"It's ther High Top Tavern, boys!" shouted a brawny miner.

Young Wild West gave a start of surprise.

"That's just what it is!" he said to Charlie and Jim. "Come on, boys! We must get there and give them a hand. It may be the stable and shed in the rear, and if it is our horses will be in danger. Get a move on you!"

He led the way at a swift run and they rapidly neared the burning building.

"My!" exclaimed Jim Dart. "That must be a regular tinder box to get going like that. There's small chances of saving the tavern."

"Might small chance, too," echoed Cheyenne Charlie.

Probably thirty or forty men got there ahead of Wild and his partners and they were running about with buckets trying their best to put out the flames.

"Is everybody out of the house?" our hero asked of the excited landlord.

"Yes!" was the reply. "They all come out at ther first cry of fire. I was putty excited, but I seen to it that ther ladies we've got here was one of ther first to git out."

"What caused the fire, do you know?"

"No! Ain't got ther least idea. It broke out upstairs

an' downstairs both at ther same time. I reckon I'll be put out of business fur a while."

"Well, it looks that way. You have no ladders to work with, and the whole roof is ablaze, anyhow. The best thing you can do is to let it go."

"I s'pose that's so," and the man shook his head sadly. "I got all ther liquor I had out, anyhow."

"That's one consolation," spoke up Charlie with a grin. The shanty was burning furiously now.

It had been so lightly built that once the flames got hold of it there was nothing to save it.

The water the men were using had to be carried from a brook a hundred yards distant, and what they brought did not have any perceptible effect on the fire.

Wild and his partners helped all they could for the next ten minutes.

They were keeping a sharp watch on the shed where the horses were, at the same time.

But the shed did not catch, as the wind was blowing the other way.

While our three friends were standing near the stable Billy Egbert and Joe Beck came running up to them.

"Have you seen anything of the ladies?" the former asked, excitedly.

"Why, no!" answered Wild. "What is the trouble?"

"Their mother can't find them," was the reply. "She has not seen them since they came out of the house with her and went under the trees over there. They brought their clothing out—everything, I believe, and Mrs. Rockert left them there to keep her husband from going into the flames to help the landlord, as she was afraid he would get hurt. When she came back to look for them she could not find them. She thought they were with us, so she says. But we never saw them after we knew they were safely out of the building; we got in and helped try put out the fire."

"Well, they must be around somewhere," spoke up Jim. "They surely can't be very far away."

"Their mother can't find them anywhere," declared Beck.

"We will take a look around for them," said Wild.

Then they made a circle of the burning tavern, looking into every conceivable place where the girls might be.

But when they came to the parents of the girls they were forced to admit that they had not seen a trace of them.

"It's mighty queer," observed Cheyenne Charlie. "It looks to me as though somebody has caught 'em an' run off with 'em. That shanty was set afire, anyhow, an' it might have been done jest to git a chance to run off with ther gals."

"I was thinking something like that myself, but I did not say anything," retorted Wild. "According to what the landlord says, the tavern was certainly set on fire by someone. Whether it was done to spite him, or for some other purpose, it is hard to tell. But I am inclined to believe that Charlie has struck the right idea."

Mrs. Rockert was ready to faint, but her husband caught her in his arms and managed to pacify her.

"Don't get frightened," Wild said to her. "I will guarantee that we will find your daughter for you. One thing is certain, they cannot be very far away. Just keep as cool as possible, and we will strike right out to look for them."

"Thank you, Young Wild West!" exclaimed Rockert. "I am satisfied that you will do as you say."

"You stay right here with your wife," our hero whispered to him. "Find a shanty that you can hire, if possible. I think you will be able to do that. Almost any of the men will vacate and camp out to accommodate a lady. Wait! Here is a man I think will accommodate you."

It was the miner who had told Wild about the picking of Rockert's pocket who was approaching.

Wild called to him and asked if he owned a shanty.

He said he did.

"Couldn't you be induced to turn it over to Mr. Rockert and his family?"

"I reckon they kin have it jest as soon as I kin git it in shape fur 'em, which won't take more'n fifteen minutes," was the quick reply.

"Good! Now, we are off, Mr. Rockert."

Our three friends were armed, the same as they were when they struck the town.

They were ready to use the weapons, too.

The more Wild thought it possible that some of the miscreants of the camp had stolen the two girls, the more he became convinced that it was so.

"The first place we will go to is the saloon where the bad gangs hang out," he said.

They hastened along, leaving the burning shanty behind them.

When they came to the saloon they found no one there but the man in charge.

"Where is Missouri Mike?" our hero asked.

"Over at ther fire, I reckon," was the reply.

Our hero knew that he was not there.

He had been on the lookout for both the worst man in Wyoming and Gloucester, the gambler.

He was positive that neither of them were at the fire.

And so were Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart.

That meant that they were up to something, quite likely.

"Boys," said Wild in a low tone, as they left the saloon, "we must find those two men, for I feel that they know something about the disappearance of the two girls. To make sure, Charlie, you go back to the fire and find out if either of them have been seen there. Jim, you take a walk around the shanties and tents, and I will go to the saloon we were just going in when the fire was announced. We will all meet at that place."

His partners understood what was required of them without any further words.

They went off on their respective errands, while Young Wild West walked leisurely to the other saloon.

Several of the miners were leaving the scene of the fire now, as it was all but out.

The thin boards had burned very quickly, and the frame work was about all that was afire now, and this lay in the ashes.

When Wild entered the little saloon he saw that it was not much of a place.

It could not possibly have accommodated more than twenty men at one time.

The man in charge was about the same sort of a man as were the followers of Missouri Mike, so our hero promptly set him down as one of the gang.

"Who has seen anything of Missouri Mike?" Wild asked, as he looked around the little bar-room.

"He ain't been in here to-night," answered the man behind the rickety counter.

"Perhaps he has left town, then," our hero observed with a smile.

"No, I don't think he has done that. Missouri Mike ain't a man who kin be made to leave a town any kinder fashion."

"You think so, eh? Well, he will leave Four Flush before long, and it may be that he will leave the earth at the same time."

"You're Young Wild West, ain't yer?" queried the saloon man.

"Yes, that's who I am," Wild answered, coolly.

"We heard all about yer here. You sorter got ther best of Missouri Mike, so they say. But I'll tell yer one thing! You'd better look out! He'll git ther best of yer in ther end, see if he don't!"

"Well, you can think that way, if you have a mind to. But you will be a very mistaken man when the end comes. Missouri Mike is going to hang to the limb of one of the trees in the camp before many hours! You just make up your mind to that, and then it won't be so hard for you to believe it when it happens."

The man looked at him in surprise.

"What's he goin' to hang fur?" spoke up one of the bystanders.

"For shooting the guide who went out with the two young tenderfeet."

"Do you know he done that?"

"He will tell you that he did himself when he finds that there will be no let up on him. See here! I would like to ask you a question. Was Mike on good terms with the guide before this thing happened?"

"I don't know whether he was or not," was the reply.

"Well, do any of the rest of you know anything about it?"

"I do!" exclaimed a little man, who had been listening to what was being said. "I know that Mike an' ther feller what got killed was bad friends. Missouri Mike told him three days ago that he was goin' to drop him ther first time he got a chance."

The rest of the men in the place turned upon the little man angrily.

"What are you puttin' your oar in fur, Delicate Dan?" the saloon keeper bawled out. "Ain't you been told lots of times to keep your mouth shut?"

"I don't care. This young feller here is made of ther sort of stuff that I likes to see. I ain't got no love fur Missouri Mike, anyhow, an' if I hadn't been like ther rest of you—afraid of him, I'd have finished him with a bullet long ago. It strikes me that Young Wild West is goin' of you, afraid of him, so I'm going to take sides with him. boys."

There was a deep silence for the space of half a minute.

The saloon man and the rest looked at each other and acted as though they did not know what to say.

"You talk like a pretty sensible man, Delicate Dan," said our hero, turning to the little man. "I am glad you have had the courage to speak your mind. Come to look at you, you don't appear to be a ruffian like some of the men in Four Flush."

"Thankee, Young Wild West. I'm mighty glad of ther good opinion you've got of me. No! I ain't a bad man, I ain't never done nothin' in ther way of stealin' in my life, an' I never took a mean advantage of a man in my life. But when a feller finds that it's best to do what them what rules ther town wants him to, what's ther only chance he's got, he simply does it, that's all. I'm kickin' over ther traces now, 'cause I think you're goin' to pull Missouri Mike down from his position."

"Delicate Dan, I believe I oughter shoot you!" exclaimed the saloon keeper, placing his hand on the big revolver that lay on the shelf behind the counter.

"Well, change your mind right away, then," spoke up Wild. "I will drop the man dead in his tracks who attempts to shoot that man!"

Just then half a dozen more of the rough element crowded into the little place.

They were just in time to hear what our hero said.

"What's ther matter?" cried one of them, looking from Young Wild West to the owner of the place.

"Nothing very serious, unless you call it serious because someone is in danger of getting shot," answered Wild in a cool tone of voice.

"Boys, I'll tell yer what's tlier matter," spoke up the little man with flashing eyes. "I've made up my mind to quit bein' ruled by Missouri Mike, that's all."

"Then I s'pose you're ther feller what's liable to git shot, then," observed a big fellow, who had not been around town to see our friends before.

"Oh! I guess he isn't the fellow," answered Wild. "The one who tries to shoot him will be the one to go under. I am going to do the shooting!"

The rough men looked at the daring boy who was standing there defying the whole lot of them, and they could hardly understand it.

The smile on his handsome face and the easy pose he had suggested nothing that might be taken for anxiety, much less fear.

The men had all heard how he had tamed the worst man

in Wyoming, and for that reason they were not anxious to pick a quarrel with him.

But if they had never seen or heard of him before, it is hardly possible that any of them would have lifted a hand to fire a shot at him.

"There is no need of anyone being the boss of this camp, I guess," remarked Wild, as he raised his hand from the butt of the revolver it had been resting on. "I think there is a chance for everyone of you to get along here, if each one minds his own business. You don't need a bully, at all, and since there are two men now in Four Flush, who had declared that they are going to kill me, I am going to stay here just long enough to break up this bullying business. If it is necessary I will shoot every man who sticks to Missouri Mike! Do you hear what I say, gentlemen? I am only one just now, but if anybody disputes what I say, let him speak up and show there is a little manhood in him."

"I reckon no one wants to pick a row with yer, Young Wild West," said the saloon keeper. "What are yer goin' ter have with me? Take a cigar, won't yer?"

"Yes, I will smoke with you," answered Wild, and as he stepped up to the bar a murmur of approval went up from the miners.

Wild had just lighted his cigar, and the men were drinking, when Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart came in.

CHAPTER X.

WHAT BECAME OF THE GIRLS.

Gloucester had laid his plans well.

It was an easy matter for him to bribe a man to set the tavern on fire.

He caught one of the bad gang sneaking around the rear of the building as he went out after supper, and on questioning him, learned that he had formerly been employed there.

He was just the man the gambler wanted.

It did not take long to fix things to suit him, and then he went over to the saloon, as has been described.

When Missouri Mike and those who were to assist him in kidnapping the girls reached a point about a hundred yards from the rear of the tavern the fire broke out.

They hastened as close as they dared under cover of the trees.

As is sometimes the case, luck was with the villains.

They happened to get in the same clump of trees that the Rockerts sought for safety when they emerged from the burning building.

Then it was a very easy matter for them to capture the two girls, when they saw that they were left alone.

Both were chloroformed in no time, and then picking them up, the scoundrels made off with them.

One of the gang ran ahead to get the horses and notify Gloucester of the success of the plot.

Missouri Mike went with the fair captives.

When they reached a snug hiding-place about half a mile outside the mining camp he called a halt.

This was the place he had told the man to bring the horses to.

They had not been there long when the horses came.

When they arrived Missouri Mike saw that Gloucester was with the man he had sent after them.

"Are you goin'?" he asked.

"Certainly," replied the gambler. "You don't think I am going to let you take my intended wife off to some place where I might never be able to find her. I am going, as a matter of course."

"Oh! I ain't got no objections. But I thought you was goin' to stay in town till we got ther gals safe in ther cave an' let you know about it."

"Most certainly not. Where the girls go so do I."

"Well, come on, then. Let's make ther most of our time an' git there."

The gambler insisted on carrying Maud Rockert on the horse with him, and with the unconscious girl in his arms, he rode along with the worst man in Wyoming and his three followers.

Missouri Mike had decided that three were enough to take with him.

But, counting himself, the party was now increased to five.

Juggs was the villain who had done the drugging of the girls, and he now had Florence Rockert on the horse with him.

As has been stated, Juggs would do anything Missouri Mike told him.

He knew very well that the company of the gambler was not appreciated just then.

That made him on the lookout for some kind of order from his boss.

Juggs could easily see that Missouri Mike was anxious to say something, but the wily gambler seemed to know it, too.

He would not give him a chance.

The party rode on out upon the mountain over the exact trail our friends had followed when they came to Four Flush after capturing Missouri Mike and saving the two tenderfeet.

They kept on until they reached the identical spot where the villain had been camped.

Then the worst man in Wyoming gave the word and swung off to the right, following the river.

At the end of perhaus five minutes he came to a halt.

"Here we are!" he said to Gloucester. "There's ther cave right ahead."

It was a wild and rocky part of the mountain.

The ground was uneven and there were so many rocks and boulders in the way that they could hardly have preceeded further in that direction with the horses.

As dark as it was, Missouri Mike seemed to know the way.

Dismounting, he turned an angle of rock and came to a narrow fissure that was barely wide enough for a horse to pass through.

Then he struck a match and held it up so he could see.

The next minute he placed his hand on a piece of pitch pine that had evidently been placed there for future use.

"Here's a torch," he said. "Now, I reckon we kin have some light."

"Good!" exclaimed Gloucester. "That is what we need pretty badly, I think."

The torch was soon burning, and then all hands came through the fissure.

Right before them was a cave, and into this they went, taking the captives and the horses with them.

The two girls were unconscious from the effects of the chloroform, and had not moved of their own accord since the drug was held over their mouths and nostrils.

But when they were deposited upon a heap of leaves in the cave one of them showed signs of coming to.

It was Maud, the eldest.

"Get some water and we will bring them to," said Gloucester. "I guess they have had enough of the drug."

"I reckon they must have had," observed Missouri Mike. "I thought they might be dead, they stayed so still."

"Oh, no! They will come out all right. They will be a little sick for a few hours, but by morning they will be as well as ever."

The head of the rapids was not far distant, and one of the men went and brought a pail of water.

That Missouri Mike evidently intended to make the cave a headquarters some time was evident, for it was fitted up with several useful things in the way of cooking utensils, blankets, etc.

When the water was brought the gambler set about to reviving the girls.

In less than half an hour they were fully restored to consciousness, but were too sick from the effects of the drug to hardly hold up their heads.

They were kept in the back part of the cave, near a place where the air came in through a crack, and placing one of the men on guard near them, Gloucester and Missouri Mike proceeded to put up some blankets in the form of curtains to shut them from the front of the cave.

When this was done to their full satisfaction the two villains faced each other, both in a questioning way.

"I think we had better start a fire in front of the cave so we can see what we are doing," said the gambler. "The torch is about burned out."

"All right. I reckon ther blaze couldn't be seen, unless someone was to git right up close here," replied the worst man in Wyoming.

So wood was gathered and a fire was started.

"Now, then," said the gambler, as he calmly took a seat before the fire, "I have got an idea."

"What is it?" asked the villain, speaking rather sullenly.

"I want you to go back to Four Flush and take my watch and chain with you. Go to the saloon and show it. Someone will ask how you came by it, and when they do, you can say that you and I had a slight misunderstanding and that two shots were fired and I went under. You thought it was a pity to leave my watch and money for somebody else to get, so you took charge of them. You are not afraid to do that, are you?"

"Oh! I reckon I ain't afraid to do nothin'. But if I do that won't Young Wild West claim ther bet you made with him an' take ther money?"

"I had forgotten about that bet. Let me see, I made a bet with you, too, didn't I?"

"Yes."

"Well, suppose we call it off?"

"Yes, I reckon we'd better."

There was a peculiar gleam in the eyes of Missouri Mike as he answered the question.

"We are friends and in the same line of business now," resumed the gambler, not noticing the look.

"Yes, we'll call ther bet off. When I go down to ther camp I'll draw my money from the stake-holder."

"Draw mine, too. I don't think I will go back there very soon."

"All right."

"Will you go there and give it out that you dropped me?"

"Yes, give me your watch an' chain."

Gloucester handed it over.

"I would like Young Wild West to hear it," he said.

"Oh! He'll hear it quick enough."

"If you can get a chance at him, you'd better put an end to him."

"You kin bet I will."

The worst man in Wyoming meant that when he said it.

He had sworn to kill Young Wild West, and though he meant to play Gloucester false, he did not alter in the determination.

"S'pose Juggs goes with me to ther camp?" he suggested a moment later. "Three of yer kin manage ter keep ther gals here, I reckon."

"Certainly. The two of you can go. Come back very early in the morning, and bring something good in the line of grub with you."

"All right."

A few minutes later Missouri Mike and Juggs mounted their horses and set out for Four Flush.

When they were well away from the cave Mike turned to his companion and said:

"We've got to git rid of Gloucester."

"That's what I was thinkin'," was the retort.

"He ain't no good, anyhow."

"No!"

"How will we do it?"

"Git him on ther river bank an' knock him on ther head an' send him down ther rapids."

"Good enough!" exclaimed Missouri Mike. "But we'll go down to ther camp first."

"Yes, an' git ther two thousand dollars."

"That's it."

They rode on at a pretty sharp clip and soon came in sight of the mining camp.

Then they turned and rode in toward their headquarters at the saloon from the rear.

The fire was out long before this, though there was still some smoke rising from the ruins.

When the two villains saw this they laughed.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SEARCH NARROWS DOWN.

As soon as they saw Young Wild West's two partners come into the saloon the men broke into another cheer.

They had been won over completely.

It was done partly through fear of Wild and partly from the persuasive way he talked.

"Gentlemen," said Wild, "there are two men missing from the camp, and I am looking for them."

"Who are they?" asked one of the miners.

"One is Missouri Mike, as you ought to know, and the other is the stranger who calls himself Edwin Gloucester. Two young ladies disappeared right after the fire in the tavern started, and I lay their disappearance to these two men."

"An' I jest reckon that you lay it to ther right ones," spoke up Delicate Dan. "I don't know jest how bad ther gambler feller is, but I do know that Missouri Mike would do anything that's bad."

"Well, we are going to hunt them up. You fellows have the privilege of joining in the hunt, if you like."

Some of the miners declared that they would, and they promptly left the saloon.

"Boss," said Wild, turning to the man who kept the saloon, "if you know when you're well off, you'll run a straight place hereafter. Things are going to take a change here in Four Flush, and I know it! The place is not going to be run by a lot of ruffians any longer. Missouri Mike killed the guide, and now he has kidnapped the two young ladies. It was either he or Gloucester who fired the tavern, too, I have no doubt. If this can be proved they must be dealt with according to the rules and regulations of this part of the country."

"I know jest what you mean, Young Wild West," was the reply. "I ain't a bad man—not half as bad as you think, I reckon. I remember of hearin' a sayin' which went somethin' like this: 'When you're in Rome do as ther Romans do.' That's ther principle I've been workin' under since I came to Four Flush."

"Then you can be good, bad or indifferent, as the case may be?"

"That's ther only way ter be, when you're in ther kinder business I'm in."

Young Wild West smiled.

"You're quite a philosopher," he remarked, as he turned to the door. "But just remember what I have said."

"Oh! You kin bet I'll remember."

Wild, Charlie and Jim left the place and walked back toward the other saloon.

Charlie declared that Missouri Mike had not been seen at the fire and Jim said he had made a thorough search of the camp without finding him or the gambler.

"They have left with the girls, then," said our hero.

"Now it is our business to find them."

"Where are we goin' to look?" asked the scout.

"Well, suppose we look around again? We will get the little miner to go with us. Wait! I'll go back and get him."

He went back and found Delicate Dan in front of the saloon.

"Come and go with us," he said to him.

"You bet I will!" was the reply. "I was only waitin' to git ther invitation."

The little man proved to be of great help to them.

He knew every one of the men who belonged to the bad gang, and he also knew their horses pretty well.

A search of a little less than an hour revealed the fact that four of the gang and five horses were missing from the mining camp.

"I can understand what that means," said Jim Dart.

"The fifth horse was used by Gloucester."

"Exactly!" Wild answered. "Now, the question is, which way did they go?"

They talked it over for a while and then concluded to go to the saloon where Missouri Mike and the gambler had been that afternoon.

They got there just as Mike and Juggs came in by the back door.

The big villain gave a start when he saw our hero.

He had just been telling Juggs that he meant to shoot Young Wild West on sight, but the moment his eyes rested upon him all his courage left him.

"How are you, Missouri Mike?" our hero called out. "I didn't see you helping to put out the fire."

Wild thought it best not to let him know that he suspected him as being connected with the kidnapping of the girls.

He decided to adopt different tactics.

"No," was the reply. "I was over in my shanty takin' a snooze. I drank a little too much liquor this afternoon, I reckon."

"Ah! Well, I suppose you feel well enough now to step outside and settle the trouble that is between you and I?"

"See here, Young Wild West," said the villain, nerving himself for all he was worth. "Why don't you let me be? I'm ther boss of Four Flush, an' no one is goin' to dispute

what I say. Jest because you got ther drop on me don't say that you're goin' to git ther best of me in a square fight. You can't do it! Jest let me alone an' mind your own business. If you wasn't so young I'd have dropped you long ago. It's your youth what has saved you, Young Wild West!"

There were a few people in the place who really thought this was true.

But the majority did not.

Wild laughed.

"All right," he answered. "But your age is not going to save you. You are going to hang from the limb of a tree before many hours, if you don't get shot before that time."

Juggs acted as though he was going to pull his shooter.

"Remember your rope suspenders," cautioned our hero, as he cast a sharp look at him.

That settled the villain.

Neither of them offered to pay any further attention to our friends, but bought a drink, and then went and sat down in the back room.

But Wild was not done with them yet.

He followed them, and so did his two partners.

"See here!" said Missouri Mike. "I may as well tell yer that you won ther money you bet with Gloucester."

"How is that?" queried our hero.

"Well, him an' me had a little trouble an' we both shot about ther same time. My bullet reached, but his didn't."

"Ah! I see."

"It was done square, too."

"You always do things on the square, I suppose?"

"I sartinly do."

"You were acting that way when you were going to send the tenderfoot over the rapids."

"I was only foolin', an' I told you so."

"I suppose you were acting on the square when you shot the guide, too."

"I didn't shoot him."

"You lie when you say that!"

The scoundrel turned all colors, but did not attempt to put up a fight.

Seeing that it was impossible to get him to make an attempt to carry out the threats he had made, Wild walked out of the room.

"Come on, boys!" he said to his companions. "This thing can't last much longer."

When they got outside he turned to the little miner and observed:

"I would like to have you keep a watch on those two men. We can't do anything now until daylight. Just watch every move they make, and if they start to leave the camp, let me know right away."

"All right," replied Delicate Dan. "I'll watch 'em, if I have to set up all night."

Then our friends went over to the stable of the burned hotel where their horses were.

Though Four Flush was about as tough a town as they had ever been in, they found that their horses had not been disturbed.

Wild gave the man who was watching the stable a silver coin and thanked him.

Then they pitched a sort of camp and turned in to get some rest.

But all were not going to sleep at the same time.

They were not going to take any chances as that.

Wild did not believe that Gloucester was dead.

He was satisfied that Missouri Mike lied when he said that.

He knew that the villain could hardly have told it if he had shot the gambler.

"It is too bad, boys," he said. "But we can't do anything more till daylight, unless Missouri Mike and that other scoundrel leave town."

"An' if they do leave we're goin' to foller 'em," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie.

"Yes."

"Do you think that the little miner will keep a sharp watch on them?" queried Jim.

"Oh yes! I have the greatest of confidence in that fellow. He is anxious to show how much he thinks of us. Just leave it to him to do as he says he will. I seldom get mistaken in a man."

"You're right you don't!" declared the scout.

It was Charlie's first watch, so Wild and Jim turned in. They slept soundly.

Jim took the second trick, and nothing happened until the time was up, so he awoke Wild.

It was now three o'clock in the morning, and our hero felt as fresh as though he had put in a full night's sleep.

He stuck it out until shortly after daylight, and then he could not resist the temptation to take a walk toward the saloon.

But he could not go and leave his companions sound asleep.

That was not his way of doing business.

Something might happen.

So he awoke them and told them what he was up to.

Then he set out for the rear of the shanty.

It was light enough for him to locate the right one, and he soon got up close to it.

Then it was that a thrill of satisfaction shot through his frame.

Two men came out of the rear door, each with a good-sized package.

They went straight to the shed that answered as a stable in the rear of the place.

They had scarcely made this move when our hero caught sight of a man hastening in the direction of the burned tavern.

It was Delicate Dan.

"The little man has watched long and well," Wild thought. "Well, if I had known as much as this, he wouldn't have had to stay up all night."

Wild concluded to stay there and take the chances of Charlie and Jim coming with the horses.

If Delicate Dan told them the two villains were making for the shed with packages in their possession they surely would take it for granted that they were going to mount their horses and leave town.

And that is just what the villains were going to do.

In less than five minutes from the time our hero saw them from the back door of the shanty they had saddled their horses.

Then they mounted and started away, taking to the woods that was in the rear of the saloon.

The two villains were on their way back to the cave, and they had provisions with them.

But the provisions were not for Gloucester.

They did not intend that he should have the benefit of them.

They were going to put him out of the way, and thus have the field all to themselves.

The two men must have been pretty thick-headed, otherwise they would have had the idea that Young Wild West was keeping a watch on their movements.

But no such thought entered their brains.

They rode fast as soon as they got clear of the woods, but they never thought of turning to look around them.

When pretty close to their destination among the rocks near the head of the rapids, they might have heard hoof-beats behind them if they had paused to listen.

But they did not.

Reaching the cave, they dismounted.

They found one of the men on guard and Gloucester and the other sound asleep.

"Got back, hey, Mike?" said the villain. "Well, I'm glad you have."

"Why? Anything wrong?" asked the scoundrel.

"Nope! Ther gals have been putty quiet. They did make a sort of a time a little while after you left last night, but Gloucester talked to 'em an' quieted 'em. He told 'em through ther curtain that he was a prisoner, too, an' that he was sure that they would all git away when daylight come."

"He did, hey?" and Missouri Mike grinned and looked at Juggs significantly. "Well, that was a good way to quiet 'em, I will say."

Then the villain whispered to his companion.

"Now is our time to fix Gloucester!"

"That's right," was the answer.

They followed the guard through the narrow place that led into the cave.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

Young Wild West and his two partners were on the trail of Missouri Mike all right.

The villains had scarcely got away from the rear of the saloon when Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart came in sight.

They were mounted and leading Wild's horse.

Just as they found him and had mounted, Delicate Dan came in sight.

He, too, was mounted.

"Somethin' tells me that ther finish is close at hand," he said, as he came up. "I want to see it."

"All right," answered Wild. "You did well to watch the scoundrels all night, and you may as well go with us. They won't get very far before I'll have them, you can bet!"

When they had covered a mile our friends realized that they were heading in the direction they had come from when they brought Missouri Mike a prisoner into town.

They kept on at a good clip, and a couple of minutes later they came upon a straight piece of road and saw the villains not far ahead of them.

Wild slackened speed.

"Easy, now, boys!" he said. "We may as well follow them right to where they are bound. I hardly think it is any further than the river, where we came upon them yesterday."

When they finally reached the place where the two young fellows from Minneapolis had been camping when the guide was shot, they were just in time to see the two going through the woods.

Their horses were almost down to a walk, so our friends slowed down.

When Missouri Mike and Juggs dismounted, our friends did likewise.

Wild was the first to touch the ground with his feet and he at once stole forward to see what the two men were going to do next.

He was just in time to hear them talking to the man who was guarding the entrance to the cave.

He heard all that was said.

His companions drew near in time to hear the biggest part of it.

"Now, you see how things are," said Wild, a smile of triumph on his face. "Delicate Dan, I guess you were right when you thought the end was pretty close at hand."

The little miner nodded.

Wild did not propose to rush in upon the men.

He felt that they would soon come out.

And he was right, for scarcely three minutes elapsed when Missouri Mike and Juggs came into view, carrying the bound form of a man.

The man was Edwin Gloucester!

"You have played me false, you scoundrels!" he said with a hiss. "I always thought there was honor among thieves, but now I know I was mistaken."

"You're right you was, you fool!" answered Missouri Mike with a coarse laugh. "Didn't I tell yer I was ther worst man in Wyoming? You oughter knowed better than to link with me. You've got a pile of money about yer, an' you had an idea that you was goin' to run ther whole

town, an' me along with it. But you was mistaken! I guess I'm ther worst scoundrel that ever breathed, an' if I ain't, it ain't my fault. I've jest made up my mind to tie you to a couple of logs an' send you down ther rapids, ther same as I was goin' to do with ther two tenderfeet when Wild West stopped me. It'll be his turn next, an' don't you forget it!"

As the two villains started with their victims toward the river, Wild turned to his companions and whispered:

"Go in and get the girls. You know just what to do if the men show fight."

"We know," retorted Cheyenne Charlie significantly.

Wild then followed Missouri Mike and his willing tool. They reached the river bank right at the head of the whirling torrent of water.

They did not attempt to cross, as the man had done in order to catch the two tenderfeet.

There were logs there in plenty, the place being an abandoned lumber camp.

The roaring torrent had not lessened in size perceptibly, and it would be nothing short of death for the villain if he was sent down the stream on the logs.

Wild did not intend to let it go that far.

One of the men was bound and helpless, and he felt sure that he could surely take care of the other two.

He waited till they got two logs ready, and were in the act of picking up their victim before he made his presence known.

"That will do, Missouri Mike!"

The words rang out with surprising distinctness.

The two villains leaped to their feet in amazement, while an exultant laugh came from the helpless gambler.

"Hold up your hands!" commanded our hero.

He had scarcely spoken when three or four shots rang out from the direction of the cave.

But that did not disturb him in the least.

He never once took his eyes from the two men.

Missouri Mike promptly obeyed the command, but Juggs did not. He made a grab for his revolver and succeeded in getting it from the holster.

But that was all.

Crack!

Wild shot to kill that time and the scoundrel leaped in the air and fell back into the river.

"There goes your partner, Missouri Mike!" the boy said. "Do you want to follow him, or do you want to go to Four Flush and be hanged?"

"Don't shoot!" was the trembling reply. "I'll do jest what you say."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Gloucester. "You are a brave man, Mike! Why don't you take your medicine? Lead is better than a rope any time."

There was no reply to this.

Young Wild West quickly disarmed the big ruffian and then tied his hands behind him.

It was just then that voices came to Wild's ears and footsteps crashed through the bushes.

"Hooray!" cried Cheyenne Charlie, as he burst into view. "We have got ther gals, Wild!"

"Good! I have got Missouri Mike and Gloucester. The other fellow is past being got."

Jim, Delicate Dan and the two young ladies now came in view.

"Oh! I am so glad!" cried Maud.

"It was awful!" added her sister.

Just then they heard someone shouting not far away.

Jim answered the hail.

Then horses were heard approaching.

"Some more of ther gang, I reckon," said Delicate Dan, drawing his revolver.

"No!" retorted Wild, shaking his head. "That was the voice of Egbert, or I am very much mistaken."

And so it proved.

The horses suddenly stopped and then hurried footsteps were heard.

Egbert and Beck came running toward them.

When they saw the girls they uttered a hurrah that could have been heard a long distance.

"We followed your trail. What do you think of that for a couple of tenderfeet?" cried Beck.

"You did nobly," answered Wild. "Well, you are just in time to be too late."

"How is that?"

"Here's ther two main ones we are after," remarked the scout. "Ther rest of 'em have turned up their toes."

"You shot ther other two, then?" queried Delicate Dan.

"Yes, we had to. They put up a fight, an' they would have dropped us if we hadn't fixed 'em."

The little miner shook his head solemnly.

"Well, we may as well get these fine fellows on their horses and get them back to the camp," said Wild. "I feel just a little bit hungry. I want my breakfast, I guess."

A few minutes later they were mounted and riding back to Four Flush.

It was not much more than an hour from the time they left the camp when they got back.

The sun was up and the miners were going to their work when the little cavalcade rode into the town.

Instantly everybody became more or less excited.

The first place they halted at was the saloon where the bad gang made their headquarters.

There were several of them standing in front of it, among them being the proprietor.

"Gentlemen, the jig is up!" said Wild. "We caught Missouri Mike red-handed, and he has got to pay the penalty."

Then they went on to the little saloon.

Here there was quite a crowd and a cheer for Young Wild West went up.

It seemed as though all hands joined in, but our hero hardly noticed it.

He did not make it appear as though he was looking for honors.

"Boys, everything is all right!" he exclaimed, when the noise had subsided. "Missouri Mike and Gloucester were the ones who kidnapped the young ladies. We caught them very incely. The three with them went under. Now is the time to make the reform of the camp complete."

The last was taken as a hint, and it not long before a petition was going around for signers.

The petition declared that the undersigned were in favor of making Four Flush a straight town and inviting all those who were not in favor of it to leave at once.

The queer part of it was that every man in the place willingly put his name to it.

The two prisoners were not asked, of course.

All were agreed upon what should be done to them.

To help matters along, the sneak who had fired the tavern told who had got him to do it.

That sealed the fate of Gloucester, anyhow.

Then Missouri Mike, feeling that there was no help for him, made a clean breast of it and told that he had murdered the guide to satisfy a grudge, and that he meant to murder the two tenderfeet.

As he talked some of the old fire came into his eyes and he wound up by exclaiming:

"I'm ther worst man in Wyoming, an' I'm glad of it!"

"And I have got more nerve than all the worst men in Wyoming put together!" added Gloucester. "I can go to my death with a smile on my face, which is more than you can do, you cowardly hound!"

It is needless to say that Rockert and his wife were overjoyed at the return of their daughters.

There was a double hanging in town before noon, but our friends took no part in it.

The two villains were tried by a quickly formed jury and they no doubt received their just deserts, though it was not in accordance with law and order.

But in those days there was no such thing as law and order in a Wyoming mining camp.

There is little more to be told.

Rockert succeeded in buying up a lot of property in and around Four Flush and started in to develop it.

Young Wild West collected his bet and his partners went back to Weston satisfied that Egbert and Beck would marry the Rockert girls some day, and that they really met the worst man in Wyoming.

THE END.

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